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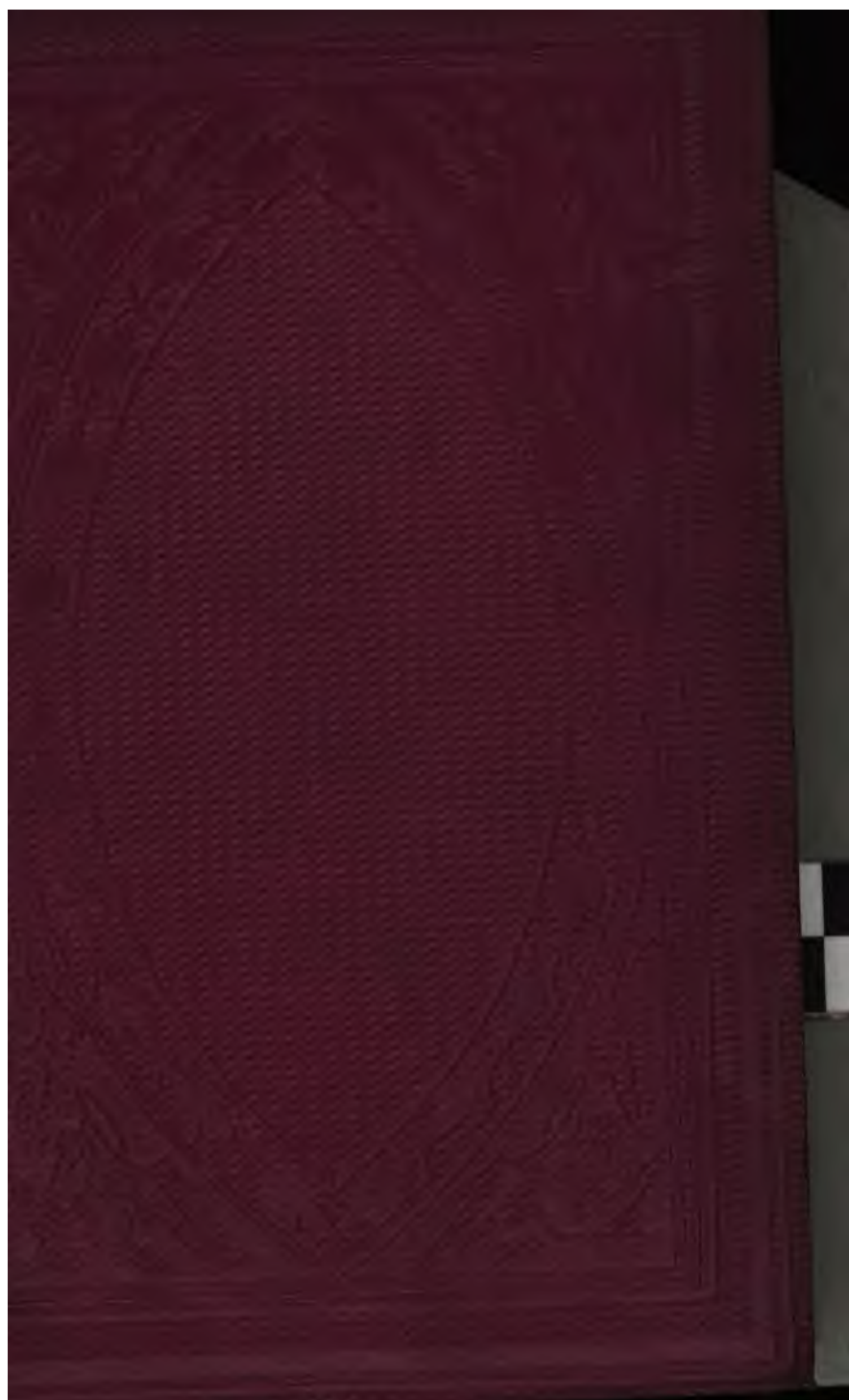
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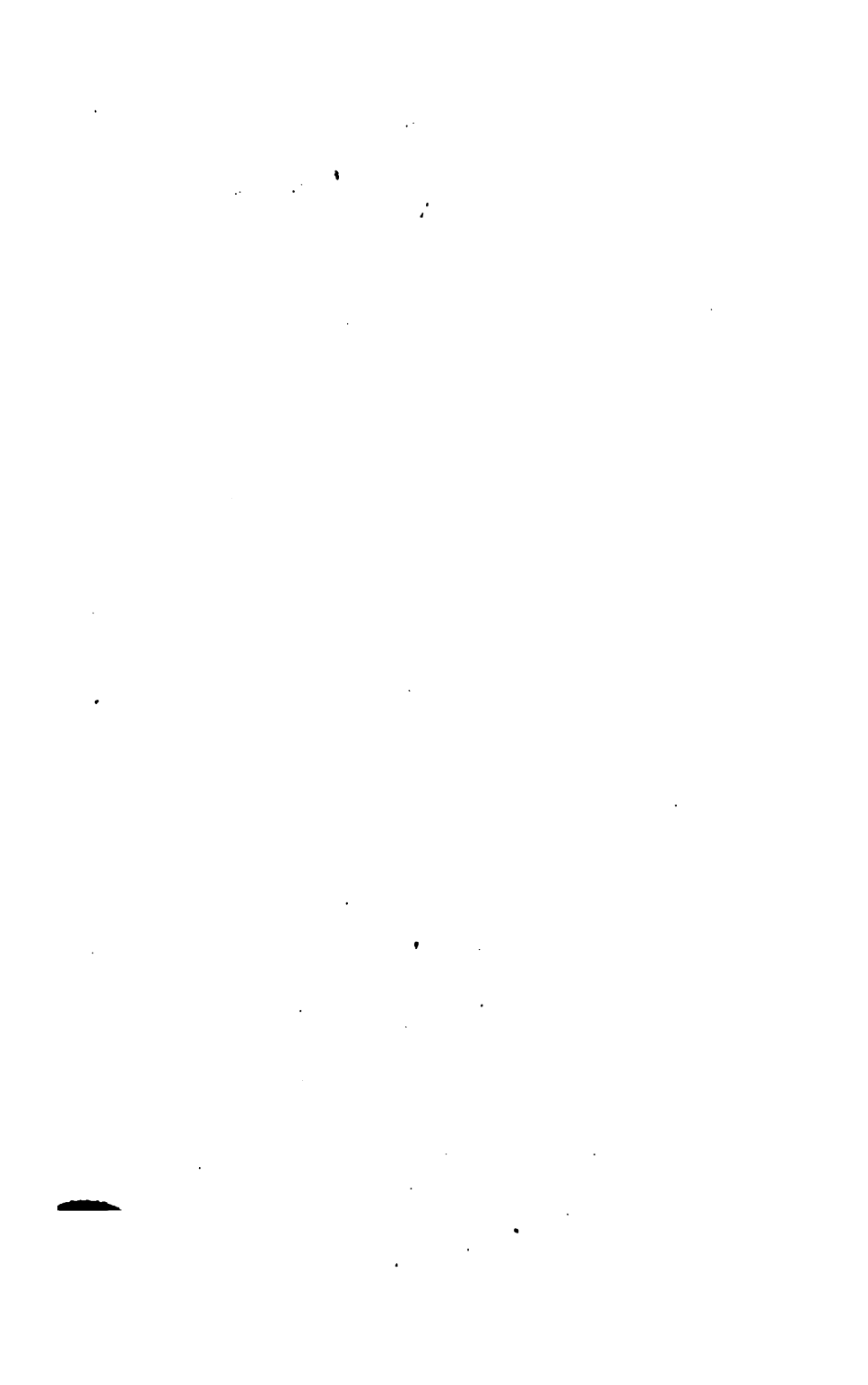
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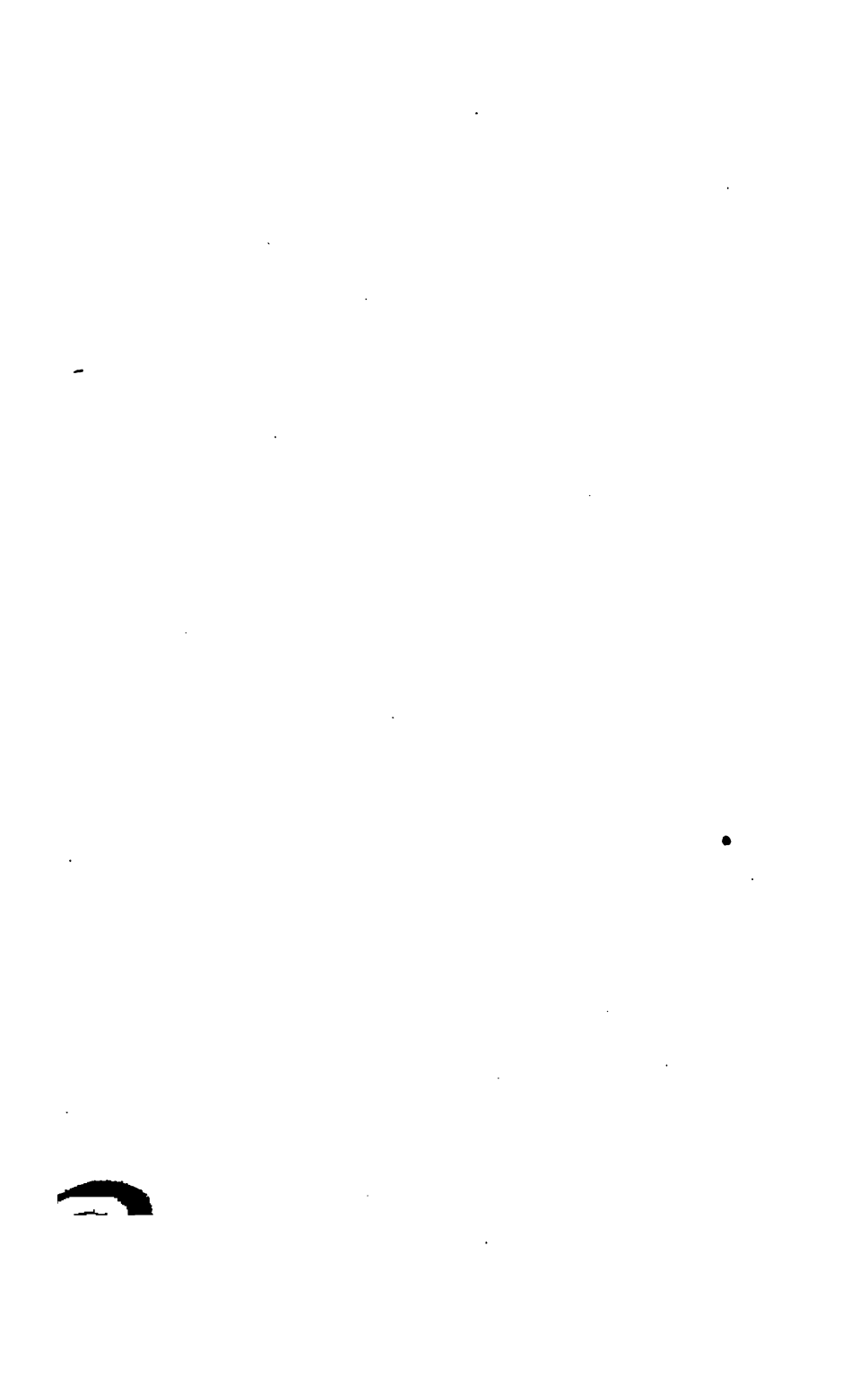
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LONDON: JAMES BLACKWOOD, Paternoster Row.



The Moated Farm.



The Moated Farm.

BY

THORNLEY GRANT.

250. b. 126.

LONDON:

JAMES BLACKWOOD, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1861.

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Preface.

“THE MOATED FARM” was written in the summer months of 1860, as a relaxation from a heavy literary labour, and amid much domestic trial and bereavement. The Author mentions this as it may account for one or two melancholy or grave passages. Perhaps it is excusable to add, that the deed of heroism attributed to Leonard Aston, was really performed by the Author’s uncle, forty years ago, in the Ashantee War in Africa, with, however, this point of difference, the real hero lost his life, the fictitious survives and receives his reward.



The Mounted Farm.

INTRODUCTION.

I SHOULD like to know, my good reader, with what expectations and in what mood you take your seat in this little theatre of which I am sole lessee and management. What do you expect to see acted here? Comedy, farce, melodrama or tragedy? Do you wish to laugh, to weep, to be instructed, or to criticise? Because, if your expectations are too high, it is only fair that I should try and allay them somewhat in the interval before the curtain rises, so that you shall run little chance of disappointment, knowing what you are about to behold. The stage, you will see, is small and rather confined, by no means well adapted for the entrance and exit of many great personages and their suites. So you must not expect or wish for many dukes, counts, or peers of the Blood Royal; though, perhaps, we may manage to introduce a member or so of the aristocracy to make it more genteel. The actors are really very simple people—plain men and women—in fact, like yourself. There will be a wicked man, who, of course, will be very wicked indeed; and a

good man, who, for your comfort, I may say will not be *too* good to be human. Then there is a lovely heroine and a few heroes, who will go through some remarkable evolutions, with entirely new scenery and machinery. To the best of their abilities they will play you a few scenes from the Drama of Life, which will, I hope, meet with approbation. Perhaps in so common a thing as the every-day life of our fellow creatures, there may be a few things to shock the nerves of very refined and fastidious people, inasmuch as all is not "couleur de rose;" in that case, I can only hope they are well provided with strong essences and pouncet boxes.

Should any moral or application strike you as disagreeable, my dear reader, pray do not think that I meant it for you, but pass it on to your next neighbour, whom it is sure to fit, and this plan cannot fail to give universal satisfaction.

Lastly, do not imagine that I want to do anything else than to amuse you. I have no secret purpose or mission that I know of, nor do I in the least desire to convert you to any "ism" or new order of things; so that you may spare yourself the trouble of searching deep for hidden meaning or secret allusion. And now, having fairly warned you what you may, and what you may not expect, it is time for the actors to be in their place, before the bell rings and the curtain rises.

The Moated Farm.

CHAPTER I.

MEETINGS IN THE MARKET PLACE.

FEW places have been more improved of late years than our small country towns. The sanitary movement, the architectural movement, and the educational movement, have combined to transform them from the mouldering mafs of hovels and dingy shops, into respectable business-like places, and this, in many cases, without losing their ancient, venerable appearance.

Marbury was one of these latter instances. It still possessed, at the time this tale begins, its fine old Abbey church, its curious market cross, and the over-hanging houses, which have so often been sketched and written upon, while, in addition to these, the town was beautified and adorned with a Corn Exchange, a Reading Room, and Mechanics' Institution. The streets were not dirtier than those of a country town ought to be, the pigeons, and cocks and hens still walked and strutted, and picked up their livelihood in the streets, as of yore; no spoiler's hand had touched the fine old elms at the entrance of the Long Street, and, altogether, it must be allowed that the place was much improved.

At the best, however, Marbury was but a dull place. It was too large for sociability, and yet too small for much amusement, being just of that unpleasant size where every one knows everybody else's business to the entire forgetfulness

of his own. It had its occasional burst of intense excitement at the election, and then the town settled well down for quarrelling until the next opportunity should occur. Nothing but the weekly market-day on Saturday could rouse the town from its stupor, but then it was tolerably full of carriages, and people shopping, besides the regular, steady-going gigs of the farmers. It is market-day now, and there are several groups and knots of young men gathered together about the Red Lion in the Market Place, talking upon various topics.

Those two standing near the principal entrance to the inn are cousins. One is Captain Arthur Lysons of the 17th, the other young Frederick Turner, a gentleman farmer, of some property and greater pretensions.

"Well, Fred, what news to-day?"

"Nothing that deserves the name. I believe we are going to have a Russian gun or some such nonsense put up in the Market Place. The mayor has been very busy about it, that's all I know."

"Of course, because he's an ironmonger, and hopes to mount it. But is that all you have to tell a fellow?"

"No, by Jove. I had nearly forgotten the great piece of intelligence. Well, now, what do you think of old Philipson having come in for something like twenty thousand a-year?"

"Nonsense, Fred."

"Yes, but really it's a fact. Of course the money is gone where it was wanted least. Now, if I had had it—"

"You would have wasted it in three months, and got in debt besides. But tell me now, seriously, how has it come to him?"

"Oh, some old cousin, I believe, whom he had never seen or heard of, drops out of the world all of a sudden, and then there he is."

"Yet it might have gone to a worse fellow, certainly," said Lysons, musingly; "he was very liberal, and not a bad kind of chap."

"Underbred, I always thought," answered his cousin. "He is always trying to ape those above him, which makes

him do ridiculous things. Hasn't he a daughter, or something of that kind? I think I have heard my mother say so."

"Yes, to be sure. Margaret Philipson is about seventeen, I should think, but I have never seen her since she was a little girl. Why, Fred, she would be the very thing for you—you had better look after her."

"Umph—we shall see. To be sure twenty thousand pounds is worth having, but I can't afford to go cheap. What is she like?"

"Oh, a regular tawny-haired lass, with a lion's mane flowing down her shoulders—a little romp she was, as I remember her."

"Red hair! good gracious, Lysons! I am amazed at your thinking she would do for me. The very idea! Why, a red girl would be dear at twice her money."

"Nonsense man. It's all the rage now, I tell you. The pre-Raphaelites are all mad about it. Don't you remember Maud?"

"I never read poetry, old fellow; but I do remember the Maud waltzes—had them the other night at the Wallace's, and a very jolly evening it was too, only the jelly tasted like weak glue and fever mixture."

"Pleasant that, certainly; but here come's Mrs. Wallace herself. You had better present yourself to show you are none the worse. Come along." And the two cousins walked off arm-in-arm towards a dashing phaeton which then was entering the Market Place. Among the farmers, the same topic of conversation was everywhere to be heard, only with more or less variation from the actual facts. Mr. Philipson was made the heir of various sums from one thousand to one hundred thousand pounds a-year, and many were the comments, gratulatory or spiteful, according to the feelings of the speaker."

"It's just enough to turn his head complete—that's what I think of it," said Mr. Lamb to Williams, the great grazier. "I don't like the whole lot of these low, half-gentlemen; they're a mean set, and there's not much in 'em; and as for Philipson, he's the worst of the set. Why, who is he, I should like to know? His father was but a little draper down Wootton; nay, and no good ever came from those parts

yet. Now, if the money had come to Lysons, or Turner, or Wilmot, they'd have known what to do with it; but this Philipson will go and spend it all in a mess of pictures and stalties and half-naked figures, that no decent man would have, and stick the things all over his house, as if he knew anything about them."

"Well, Mr. Lamb, and I dare say what you say is true, but, somehow, there are worse fellows than Philipson. He isn't a bad chap to deal with; and as for his birth, why, what does that matter—all the nobs go and see him hunting, and such times; and he's thick with the best of them."

Just then a pretty little pony carriage came spinning down the Market Place, in which was seated the subject of all this conversation. Philipson was a tall, rather good-looking man of about forty-five. His countenance was of a broad, massive type, which one is disposed to associate with an open, good-tempered disposition. But a second look at Edward Philipson's face was quite enough to show the fallacy of this theory in his instance. There was a look of restlessness about the light blue eye, that of itself, proclaimed a crafty, sly nature, while the firm hard lines of the mouth gave evident traces of obstinacy and cruelty. Besides all this, a demeanour unquiet without liveliness, and forward without real friendliness, betrayed the "half-gentleman," to use the term just now applied to him by Mr. Lamb. As far as the cut of his dress, the style of his equipage, and the pace of the handsome pair of ponies he drove could make him, he looked the grandee which he aspired to be thought—and that was enough for him.

The groups round by the Red Lion began to fall back on either hand, expecting his ponies to swing round into the yard where he generally put up. But it was evident that his business was not in town to-day; for, passing the inn by, and nodding familiarly to his acquaintances, right and left, with an elegant bow to Mrs. Wallace in her phaeton, he kept on steadily down the Long Street, and in a few minutes was far on his way to the village of Northmoor, where, if you please, we will follow him.

CHAPTER II.

A DRIVE.

It would be difficult to imagine a more beautiful and picturesque road than that from Marbury to Northmoor. The Long Street ended abruptly on the very brow of a hill, down the precipitous side of which the road ran. High up on either hand, rose banks, almost cliffs, of marl, with occasional white blocks of stone jutting out and contrasting well with the deep red soil, while above all, stood a feathery tuft of bushes which crowned the ascent and nodded over the road. As the road sloped down to the level land below, fresh beauties awaited the traveller. The hedges were covered with the bright dog-rose blossoms, and festoons of wild clematis, honeysuckle, and traveller's-joy; while the ditches were thick with ragged robin and "forget-me-nots" mingled with the wild luxuriance of the bracken and heat's-tongue ferns. Beyond, the fields gave generous promise of full harvest, and early enough to gladden the eyes even of the most complaining farmer. But all this was lost upon Mr. Philipson; and I question whether he observed a single detail of what I have described as he drove along. His ambitious, eager spirit was far too busily engaged to pay any attention to such trifles, and his compressed lips and thoughtful brow showed that his mind was far away; and so it was, truly: nor is this wonderful, considering the late change in his fortunes. Although he had never known other than easy circumstances, yet the sudden accession of nearly twenty thousand pounds a-year could not but be a very great event to him. Many were the plans which passed through his mind

—many the projects thought of for a moment and then dismissed. His house must be rebuilt—that was clear. Margrove Lodge, though very well suited for modest eight hundred per annum, would never do for twenty thousand. No, it was decidedly necessary to rebuild. The front would do, perhaps; the present dining-room would make a very good study, but the kitchen and offices must come down, and the stables be enlarged. What style should it be? Palladian, Rustic, or Gothic? The last seemed becoming fashionable—several people he knew had Gothic additions to their houses. By the bye, he would write to Lord Newberry and ask him the name of his architect who had just built that billiard-room and conservatory. Yes, that he would, and at once. And then the boudoir—yes, it must certainly face south. “What on earth does a widower want with a boudoir?” asks the reader, not unnaturally. Well, my dear reader, I do not mean to tell you *all* Mr. Philipson’s thoughts, but shall leave you to imagine some yourself, of course though a boudoir is the last thing a widower of fifteen years’ standing would ever think of. Then there were the gardens. He must have a border of rhododendrons and azaleas. Whatever was the name of that American fellow who grew them so well? never mind, he could find out. Cactusses, or rather Cacti—for all the grand people called them so—he must have plenty of them. Mrs. Wallace had a glass passage lined with them. How well that would look. Well, at last, he would show all the world that he knew what was good taste; and all could be done easily during his absence abroad—supposing he stayed there seven or eight months. Yes, to be sure, just the thing. And the boudoir should be white and gold—no; blue and silver—no, Captain Lysons said blue was so bad for the complexion; well, he would ask some one who knew. How old would Margaret be when he returned—seventeen or eighteen—well, it did not matter; young enough, anyhow. That girl seemed born to be a plague to him. She ought to have been a boy, anyhow; and then she had not the good taste, as she was a girl, to be pretty. What on earth could he do with a red-haired girl of seventeen? Fancy red

hair for an heiress of twenty thousand a-year! It was ridiculous. And of course she would be absurdly grown, horribly forward, and would always call him "papa." Bah! How long was it since he had seen her? four years; could it be so long ago as that? Well, at all events—Hullo, here he was at Northmoor already.

The well-trained ponies had stopped of their own accord before the only house in Northmoor which their master ever visited, that of his two unmarried sisters. And a very pretty specimen of an old-fashioned, red brick house it was, half buried in laurels and evergreens, and with a smooth, well-kept lawn in front, dotted with little flower-beds and standard roses. In the porch were two rustic seats, and upon these were seated two ladies, perhaps, respectively of the ages of fifty and fifty-five—the Misses Philipson, in brief. Miss Philipson the elder, was a tall, slender, undeniably stiff, and stately lady, with a high-hooked nose, which, as she said, always showed "blood." I do not mean anything so vulgar as to say that it was actually always bleeding, on the contrary, Miss Philipson looked as if she had not an ounce of that fluid in her body; but it was her belief that that style of nose was only to be found in decidedly good families—indeed, it was quite enough to ennoble her father, the Wootton tradesman. She was not a bad old lady take her as a whole, with some absurd notions, to be sure, but with a good heart at bottom; and her only serious defect was, a dreadful habit of speaking her mind in the most out-spoken manner possible, which she called candour, and her enemies censoriousness. Miss Anne Philipson, her sister, was a complete contrast in all respects—person, mind, and manners. As to the first, she was short, of fair complexion, and rather stout; her countenance gave signs of great amiability of disposition, without strong character or much mind. Rather fidgety, though placid in temper, she was always busying herself in some benevolent scheme for others, and in consequence, was continually taken in and deceived. She had the most unbounded respect and love for her sister Kate, who she believed to be one of the wisest and best of mortals, taking

her occasional rebuffs and snubbings in an exemplary manner, and never doubting that she deserved them all. She certainly would not have got on well in life without her sister's sound good sense and firm judgment; and Kate returned her affection by looking upon Anne as certainly a very good-tempered, good-natured person—rather a noodle, and wanting in gumption. Both the sisters united in adoring their brother Edward. He was the most perfect mortal they had ever seen, and for him nothing could be too good or great. Indeed, his late fortune they regarded not so much as a piece of good luck, but rather in the light of a testimonial and recognition from Providence, of the merits and excellencies of their brother, Edward Philipson. His occasional visits to Northmoor were looked forward to as those of an angel; and had they had any idea of when he was coming, I verily believe that they would have strewed flowers in his way. I cannot say that Philipson showed much perception of all this love and attention that was lavished upon him, but it is no rare thing to see sisters pouring out their warmest affections upon those who are too self-engrossed to make any acknowledgment. He was always polite to them, gave them good advice, and sometimes scolded them when foolish—and I suppose that is the sum of the relationship of a middle-aged brother and sister.

“Bless me, Kate, I declare, here is Edward at the door; how very odd, just as we were speaking of him.”

Considering the Misses Philipson were speaking of Edward *all* day long, it was not remarkable that he should find them so engaged.

“Ring the bell, Anne, and John can go and take his carriage. Is the luncheon still on the table? You had better see there is some of that golden sherry he likes so.” “Well, brother Edward,” she exclaimed, as Mr. Philipson came across the lawn to where they were, “you are just in time for lunch. You’ll stay now, won’t you?”

“Yes, indeed, I can stay an hour or so. I came to have a long talk. Where’s Anne?”

"Only gone in doors to tell them to leave the luncheon. Come in, there's a good boy."

As they walked through the little hall, Mr. Philipson's quick eye detected a piece of neglected advice, and proceeded to lecture the defaulter. "What, not had that clock set right yet? Really Kate, I am surprised at a sensible woman like you letting things go on so. As for Anne, she knows no better; but you ought to at all events. That clock has been wrong for three months now, when ten minutes work would put it all right. Well Anne," as his other sister came in.

"Well Edward, dear, just the person we wanted to see. How good of you to come—only I thought I heard you scolding as I came in; please don't, and let us talk over your affairs. So you are going to pull down Margrove and build up a castle there, I'm told."

"And who on earth told you such confounded rubbish, ma'am, I should like to know. Some tattling idiot from Marbury, who wants his tongue slit, I'll be bound."

"My dear Edward, don't be so angry. It is only one of Anne's foolish exaggerations of the ordinary gossip of the village. I have remonstrated with her upon the indecorum of listening to such idle communications, but in vain."

"Well, well brother Edward, I am very sorry if you are angry. I am sure I didn't mean it anyways. But how much is true of what we have heard?"

"Why, Anne, it was partly that I came about to-day: but I'll tell you after lunch. Ha, what's here? Fish, chicken, salad, all very good—just one glass of that sherry, if you please, my dear."

The next ten minutes or so was occupied in the great business of the table, while the sisters looked on in admiration of Edward's condescension and goodness. When he had finished, and had wheeled his easy chair round to the window, he began—

"As there are so many foolish reports about, it is only fair that you should know what I really mean to do, especially as, perhaps, I shall ask you for your aid to my plans. Well, it's quite true that I intend to alter Margrove,

though, of course, I don't mean to build a castle or any such nonsense. But I am going to have it much enlarged and improved; new dining and drawing-rooms; new stables and offices, and what not—in fact, I am going to make it more suitable for me to live in, for you know now I shall take my proper place among the country people.”

“No one fitter,” sighed Miss Anne.

“Well, then, my dear sisters, you will not be surprised to hear that I mean some day to marry again.” There, now, the real reason for the boudoir leaps out.

“Your resolution, my dear Edward,” remarked Miss Kate, “is highly to be commended, and is characterised by that sound, good sense which seems indigenous to your character. Excuse me, sister Anne (observing an attempt on that worthy lady's part to interrupt her exordium), but I am sure it will be better for me to express at once how highly I admire our brother Edward's intentions. Your former marriage, my dear brother—you will pardon me—but I always esteemed it a mistake.”

“You are right, Kate,” said her brother, “and I do not mind saying that I regret it now.”

“Yes: Kate Hardman was in every way inferior to you, looks, position, and wealth. Still, you did a very generous thing in marrying her. That must be a consolation to you.”

Certainly it ought to have been a very great comfort indeed, to that estimable man who had married poor Kate, the daughter of a clergyman, in a moment of passion, and showed his repentance by breaking her heart by degrees.

“Well, well, all that is past, and I have now a new life opening upon me. I mean this time to choose for beauty, good birth, and manners. That will be indispensable—money considerations, you know, I can put aside.”

To hear the man talk—son of a little draper—money he could put aside! But the good sisters listened in speechless raptures, and looked upon him as the type of generosity.

“But have you any one in your mind, brother Edward?” asked the warm-hearted Kate.

“Not as yet. There is no hurry for me to enter upon any matrimonial connection. I shall choose deliberately.”

"And how do you think Margaret will like it?"

"That consideration really has not entered my mind. I trust you do not imagine it necessary for a man of my age to ask a girl's approbation of my conduct?"

"Certainly not, brother Edward, but I thought——"

"Well, Anne, it does not matter much what your thoughts were. My daughter Margaret will think on this and other subjects as I choose her. I am glad, however, that you mentioned her, as it brings me to the object of my visit. I am going abroad."

"Abroad?" "abroad?" was echoed in different tones of amaze.

"Yes, that is my resolution. I believe that a sojourn of some months on the continent, will give me that distinguished ease and polish of manner usually to be observed in the travelled. It is also necessary that I should attain a clear view of the present state of continental affairs, as it is by no means unlikely that I shall be called upon to represent the borough of Marbury."

"Indeed, brother, and they could not have a better person, I am sure," said Anne. "I only wish poor father could have lived to see the day."

"Our father, sister Anne, was a very worthy and respectable man. At the same time, his views were not of that extensive and wide nature that I could have wished. However, to return to my plans. I shall stay abroad, perhaps seven or eight months, while Margrove is being altered and enlarged; and it is now about Margaret I would speak. You know she cannot stay at school any longer, and as her preference in my projected journey would be inconvenient in the highest degree, I confess I have thought of asking you two to receive her for the time. I shall, of course, fully reimburse you for any trouble or expense you may be at. Now, what do you say, Kate?"

"My dear brother," began the eldest of the maiden pair, in her most sententious tones, "while I acknowledge that, viewed in an ordinary way, the idea of a visitor, or rather, additional inmate of our house, would not meet with very prompt or full assent from me, yet, when I consider that

that proposed visitor is our niece and your daughter, I confess that it makes a very considerable difference."

"Which means, Kate," said Mr. Philipson—

"That, for my part, I have no objection to your proposal of niece Margaret coming to us. What do you say, Anne?"

"Say, sister Kate? I am sure I shall be very glad to have the poor thing here. I always loved her as if she were my own daughter, and I have not seen her these many years. And when do you think of going, Edward?"

"I have several things on hand which will detain me here for perhaps a month, after which I shall at once leave for Paris, and so to Italy. But, as regards my daughter, I must say a few words. You know, at present, she is my sole heir, and it is still possible that she remains so. Now, an heiress of twenty thousand a-year is sure to be much sought after, and I dare say, some will try in my absence."

"What, under *our* care, my dear Edward?" said the alarmed Miss Philipson.

"Yes, even under your care, Kate," was the reply. "Love finds its way anywhere, you know. However, Margaret must never be married without my entire consent, and I have many ideas on that subject. The heiress of twenty thousand a-year should be well matched, and make a high connection—it may very probably advance my position. You will understand then, that I wish Margaret to live quite quietly with you—make few acquaintances, and those safe ones; and mind and not let her get in that Marbury clique. As for money arrangements, we can settle those at our leisure, for there really is no present hurry. And now, then, let us talk of something else."

Accordingly, the subject of Margaret was adjourned, and they passed on to various other topics of interest, until the ponies made their appearance at the door, and whirled Mr. Philipson away in a cloud of dust, which, to his admiring sisters, appeared rather a halo of glory.

CHAPTER III.

A FAMILY PICTURE.

FORTY years before the events recorded in this history, John Philipson, draper, haberdasher, and hatter, was the most respectable tradesman in Wootton-under-Edge. He possessed a long, large, ill-lighted, ill-ventilated shop in the Market Place, on one side of which were dispensed ribbons, laces, and calicos for the ladies; on the other, cloth, and fustian, and felt hats for the other portion of creation. It was crowded all day long, and occupied the whole time of the master and his five assistants. Every one said that old Philipson must be putting by heaps of money, for he lived in a plain, simple style which could not cost much. He might have been mayor several times had he wished, but his manners were too retiring and quiet for him to wish for this dignity, and he and his wife preferred jogging on their own way. They had three children—Kate, Anne, and Edward, all of whom have already been introduced to the reader. The two former were at the best young ladies' seminary the place could afford, where they actually learnt French and music, while Edward was sent to the grammar school at Stroud, where he was progressing famously. So you see old Philipson had not such bad ideas of his children's education as you might imagine. He was a sharp, clever, old man himself; and having struggled against the disadvantage of his own imperfect education, sensibly resolved to give his son and daughters the best he could afford. Mrs. Philipson was a gentle, tranquil old lady, and a notable manager. No household cares were beneath her notice and inspection; and though frugal, she was not mean or sparing when occasion

required. Although she secretly murmured at the kind of education bestowed upon her daughters, she yet resolved not to neglect what lay in her line, and accordingly the Misses Philipson were early initiated in all the mysteries of housekeeping. It is not to be supposed that such excellent matches as these decidedly were, were not likely to attract. When Kate was about twenty, she had an offer from a young chemist who had one of the best shops in her native town. But that young lady looked higher; and buoyed up on her high-bred nose, she indignantly rejected his proposal. Whether the disappointed suitor renewed it or not, I know not, but certain it is, that that was the first and last matrimonial proposal that Kate Philipson was the object of. Pretty Anne, on the other hand, had several at various times, but always refused, on account of the bad health of her mother, whose constant nurse and attendant she was. So it was that both the sisters passed through life single, until they arrived at the enviable distinction of "old maids."

Edward in due time left school and returned home, where he led an idle, aimless life, generally hanging about with any gentleman or "squireen" he could find—frequenting races, coursing meetings, and such amusements, and, in other respects, "going to the bad." Old Philipson did not at all approve of his son's proceedings, and began to think that he had educated him above his station. At last, things came to a final issue, and he was obliged to threaten to cut him off pennylefs, unless he was willing at once to come to the shop. Edward was subdued, but not cured. He quietly submitted to the hated shop, but privately resolved to wait his opportunity of ridding himself of this incubus, and becoming a gentleman. It was nearer than he thought, for both father and mother died within a very few days of each other, after living together almost sixty years. Great was Edward's amazement, on looking into his father's affairs, to see how much richer he had been than he had ever thought. Old Philipson had always kept the balance sheet to himself—money was forthcoming whenever needed, but the actual yearly profits of the shop no one knew but himself, not even his wife. He had also invested, from

time to time, large sums of spare cash on various profitable speculations; and as he had occasionally lent money at somewhat high interest, by all these means he was enabled to leave to his two daughters one hundred and fifty pounds per annum each, and the residue, amounting altogether to nearly eight hundred pounds, to his son. Little time was lost by Edward in getting rid of the obnoxious source of his wealth, and removing to a place where the name of Philipson was not connected with the large haberdashers in the Market Place, he soon expended his ready money in purchasing the small estate of Margrove, near Marbury, where he settled down, as Mr. Pepys would say, "mighty content." His sisters took a house on the opposite side of the town, as they had pretty decided hints from their dear brother, that any nearer approximation would be undesirable. At the age of twenty-six, Edward Philipson began, in the most business-like manner, to look out for a lady to do the honours of his pretty house, when, most unhappily for her, he fell in love and speedily married the only daughter of a then very poor incumbent of a watering place where he was staying. No man is entirely bad; and Philipson certainly was not without what he believed to be a sincere love for Kate Hardman, but it lasted but for a little time. Her quiet, patient, loving disposition was ill qualified to endure the harshness and neglect with which her husband treated her. He wanted a bold dashing woman to ride his horses, sit at the head of his table and receive his guests in some fashion. Instead of that, he had found a pale, fragile young creature, too timid almost to look him in the face. It is not to be wondered then, with his disposition, that the gentleman's parties at Margrove increased in number, and his absences from home were more and more frequent. When he was there, all he did was to worry and tease and thunder at his poor wife, who loved him in spite of all. But nature's powers of endurance were soon worn out in her case, and after some two years of uncomplaining wretchedness, she died soon after the birth of little Margaret. If Mrs. Philipson had wished in her last act to enrage her lord, she could not have managed better. A

girl, instead of the son he had longed for, was enough, in his ideas, to exasperate him more than ever. He refused to see the child, and said a few rough words to the poor mother, which hastened her death some hours. He soon had a good nurse for the baby, and troubled himself no more about her. He quickly became well known in the society of Marbury, and the country round. He was to be seen at all the meets, and his little bachelor dinners, where the best of wines were to be had, soon made him a popular character. As soon as the little Margaret was old enough, she was despatched to an excellent school in London; and as part of her father's stipulation had been that her holidays were to be spent away from home, her intercourse with her father was limited to an occasional flying visit of form, when any business called him up to town. In this way Philipson had passed the eighteen years since his wife's death, and on the principle that "so long as thou doest well unto thyself, men will speak good of thee," few men were more popular or sought after. Now that his accession of fortune is come, we shall see what his value is among his fellow-men.

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

Six weeks have passed. Mr. Philipson is in Paris, learning, we will hope, "the distinguished ease and polish of manner to be observed in the travelled," and in the meantime, Margrove is in the hands of the builders and architect, who are rapidly transforming it from a rather pretty cottage *ornée* to a more imposing edifice in size and ornament. One morning about a week before his departure abroad, Mr. Philipson had suddenly appeared at Madame Ortelli's establishment for young ladies, and informed the principal that his mission was to bear Miss Philipson away to Northmoor. A grim kiss and three grey-kidded fingers, stiffly extended, formed all the welcome poor Margaret received from the father she had not seen for four years; and yet, to tell the truth, that father was most greatly surprised at her appearance and demeanour. Margaret Philipson was very beautiful. Tall and graceful in figure, with beautifully modelled hands and arms which she inherited from her mother, with a delicate pink flush upon her oval face, and a pair of earnest, truthful, dark blue eyes of the rare hue of the sapphire, she could not fail to be otherwise than lovely, and yet her chief attraction lay in those golden locks, which her father had profanely called "red." *That* they certainly were not, but were as far removed from it as from its opposite, flaxen. Their colour was exactly that of chased gold, flashing with a thousand lights and tints, with bright sunny threads like the finest silk. Her manner was ordinarily calm and composed, though, when speaking on any favourite topic, she flushed up into momentary

impetuosity and earnestness. She had fondly tried to persuade herself that her father's dislike and coldness would disappear as she grew older, and had looked forward with childish impatience to the time of her leaving school—had drawn many a bright picture of the happy time when she was to be his companion and confidante. How were these dispelled in an instant by the cold, precise manner in which her impetuous, affectionate greeting was received! She might as well have dashed herself against the mantel-piece, with its old-fashioned carving, as embrace that well-dressed, showy, heartless animal.

"Thank you, that will do. I dislike raptures exceedingly," was his greeting, followed by, "I hope you are well. I wish you to pack at once, as I shall call for you at five o'clock to take you away."

"Am I to leave school, papa? Am I going to live with you? Oh, how glad I am; thank you so much. I long to see dear old Margrove again; and, papa, I have never congratulated you upon your fortune—though I am very glad of it for *your* sake, it will not make me love you the more, for that I cannot do."

"Thank you. You will remember to be ready at five exactly; unpunctuality annoys me."

What could be done with such a man? The journey passed in almost total silence. Mr. Philipson wished it so, his head ached. If anything ached, it ought to have been his heart, as he sat opposite his half-frightened, half-saddened daughter, and thought—for he sometimes could not help thinking of Kate Hardman, her mother, whose heart he had broken. Not that he blamed himself—no, not in the least. Even if he had been foolish and infatuated, she ought to have known better than to marry him. Of course, it was all for his money; yes, that was it. And then the must needs pine and mourn, and go about in that hateful, quiet, uncomplaining manner—like a ghost. What business had Margaret to have her eyes? Pshaw! How like hers they were that day when she tried to hold out her new-born baby for him to kiss! Why on earth did the girl keep on staring so—he'd move. And the great Mr. Philipson

actually found himself worked up into a boiling passion by the colour of his daughter's eyes. He moved and pulled down the blind with such a jerk as to break the cord. Then there she was again with her offers to help him. It was enough to enrage him. Why *was* she a daughter? If it had only been a son and heir, he'd have been no impediment to a second match; but a daughter—and she was certainly very good looking—just the thing to make his future wife jealous. It was hateful to think of.

Meanwhile, what were Margaret's thoughts? Look where she would—past, present, future—showed her a dreary prospect of neglect and dislike. Her father was literally the only relative she had ever seen from a child, and he—well, she began to fear he hated her. What had she done?—what could she ever have done to make him behave so? It was impossible for her ever to have offended him whom she had only seen some dozen times. Could it possibly be because, as she had heard, her birth was the cause of her mother's death? If so, and he so truly loved his wife—her mamma—yes, she could forgive the injustice with which she was treated—could almost love him for it, at least she would lose no opportunity of winning his affection.

Mr. Philipson was awoke from an uneasy sleep by their arrival and stopping at Marbury. In a few minutes more they were seated in the pretty open carriage which awaited them, and were dashing through the streets of that excellent borough. Margaret, even in her sorrow, looked round with a feeling of pleasure upon the well known old shops and houses, familiar, even after many years' absence. To her surprise her father did not drive on by the Abbey, but turned short down the steep road I have before described.

"Are we not going to Margrove, papa?" she ventured timidly to ask.

"You are going to your aunts at Northmoor, where you will in future live," was the response—one calculated to raise mingled thoughts of pleasure, surprise, and a little fear.

These aunts Philipson were utterly unknown to her. They had been her god-mothers, she had at some time

heard, but that was all she knew of them—naturally having no clear remembrance of their appearance on that occasion. Would they like her? would they be kind? or would they be like her papa? Why was she not to live at Margrove? what did all this mean?

In the midst of all this doubt and wonder, they arrived at the pleasant little red brick cottage where the old maids lived. The first glance re-assured Margaret, for, passionately fond of flowers herself, she could not believe that people who lived in a house covered with jasmine, red roses, and convolvulus—who had flower baskets and standard roses all over the lawn, could be otherwise than kind and friendly. Nor was she disappointed; for the hearts of the good sisters were moved towards her, and the eager embrace of Anne, together with the more stately, but not less affectionate kiss of Miss Kate, went far to make up for the coldness and indifference of her father.

And so, in course of time, Mr. Philipson went abroad, leaving Margaret at the cottage of Northmoor.

CHAPTER V.

THE TEA TABLE.

It is a bright, warm, summer evening in August. The sun is setting gloriously and filling the west with bars of scarlet, purple, and opal, and little floating clouds looking like the pickings of the celebrated golden fleece of old. A ruddy, warm light falls on the lawn and the garden of Northmoor, turning each blade of grass into a flash of gold, and making the copper beach to glow with flames as if in a furnace. It falls within the drawing-room, and Miss Philipson is obliged to shade her eyes, while Margaret walks to her window to enjoy the scene. A very pleasant room that drawing-room is. Its great charm is the mingling of ancient and modern furniture and ornaments it possesses. A rich Turkey carpet of warm but subdued tones—one of those which are never too hot-looking in summer, nor yet chilly in winter—an antique ebony and ivory cabinet, surmounted by Indian idols and Dresden dragons—a marvellous old work-table with spindlehanks, and a grand inlaid bureau, formed the contributions from the antique, while pleasant lounging chairs, little fairy tables, always ready when wanted, close to your elbow, a cottage piano, and sundry elegant vases and other ornaments, were the less venerable but not less comfortable additions of modern times. A few water colours from Margaret's pencil, and a large engraving of the Iron Duke, enliven the walls, and a lovely bouquet of red cactus and feringa, set in fern leaves and saxifrage, again call one to admire Margaret's tasty handiwork.

Miss Philipson, who regards easy chairs as inventions of the Evil One, is seated stiff and upright in a straight-backed

nun's chair, which her own hands have worked. Her sister, on the other hand, more luxurious, is reclined in a little low Devonshire chair, engrossed in the mysteries of knitting. The servant enters with the tea tray, and Miss Philipson, with grave solemnity, seats herself at the head of the table. Tea-making with her is a grave and serious duty not to be lightly undertaken, and a subject on which she has certain ideas and fancies of her own. In the first place, both tea-pot and tea-cups, in her estimation, should be thoroughly heated, which is accomplished by strange manoeuvres and libations of hot water into and out of them; then another firm idea is, that dust always settles in the spout of the kettle, so that a little water has always to be cast away; lastly, when with much labour she has made and safely poured out the precious beverage, so convinced is she that persons, in a wicked manner, waste the sugar by letting it lie unstirred, that she takes to herself the task of stirring each several cup before it reaches its owner. So you may imagine tea-making takes a long time: it is accomplished at last, and they are all seated, when a figure darkens the open window and a pleasant voice inquires, "At tea, ladies—may I venture to come in?"

"Pray come in by all means, Dr. Evans—always glad to see you," answers Miss Kate, with whom the worthy Dr. is a great favourite, and in a minute after he is seated by their side.

The Rev. Theophilus Evans, D.D., was one of the most charming, excellent men it is possible to imagine. Of good family, splendid abilities, and high connections, he had many opportunities of changing his quiet rectory of Northmoor for a more lucrative and important position, but had always preferred remaining in a parish where he was so much beloved, and had so many friends. With a keen and polished wit which he never used ill-naturedly—a deep knowledge of mankind, always employed to some good end—a most indefatigable love of real hard work, both mental and bodily, enough to tire down most young men, and, to crown all, a most benevolent, cheerful, happy temper, it is not wonderful that Dr. Evans was a universal favourite.

Few men could have had more extensive acquaintance—

none could have used it to better purpose. He was equally welcome in the palace of the bishop and the humble cottage of the hedger and ditcher—he was quite as much at home when dining with dukes and earls, as when taking a cup of brown warm water, miscalled tea, with any poor old woman in his parish; and in both positions his advice was equally sought for, his keen good-natured wit equally appreciated. For his age, which was upwards of fifty-five, he was a singularly good-looking man. His well-defined intelligent face was suffused with that even ruddy hue which bears testimony to many cold baths and vigorous exercise. Two piercing, clear, blue eyes, from under a penthouse of shaggy eyebrow, looked not simply *at* but through you, and a fringe of snowy hair, mingled in part with its original black, surrounded the noble shaped head. In dress, he was particularly careful and neat, though not finicking or dandyfied—his linen was spotless—his clothes well made and well brushed; altogether, with his trim suit of black and hat slightly inclined to the archi-diaconal shovel, he had a truly venerable appearance.

“My visit is chiefly to you, young lady,” he began; “and I really reproach myself that I have not sooner made your acquaintance. A new parishioner is a great acquisition to us here, in our quiet, hum-drum way. You are come to make a long stay, I hope?”

“For some months at the least, I think, and perhaps longer.”

“Ah, that is well! then I have no doubt but that we shall be excellent friends. Well, Miss Kate, you have not followed my advice yet and bought a percolator? You still keep to your traditional way of making tea.”

“Ah, Dr., you know I am not well inclined to all these new fashioned inventions that come out every day. Making tea is a thing which requires all one’s mind, and I don’t see how a percolator is to give that.”

“Well, well, you are a staunch Tory I see, and will sail against the age. I shall live to see you use one of these machines, you reprobate, yet, however: don’t you think so, Miss Anne? Come, you are not prejudiced, I know. And

how does the knitting go on? I have to thank you on behalf of my housekeeper, for the beautiful comforter you sent her. She was so pleased with it, that she actually wanted me to wear it out at night."

"Why, I am sure, Dr., I should only be too glad to make you a dozen of them, if there was any chance of your putting them on. I have been trying to teach Margaret to make them too."

"And how do you progress, Miss Philipson?"

"I am afraid I make a very bad pupil, sir; I never can remember all the signs and letters."

"What, the P.R. and O.P., and all the rest of them? It always reminds me of a boy saying Euclid. But I suppose you have other more congenial employments to occupy you?"

"Margaret reads a great deal, Dr., too much, I think, for her age," remarked Miss Philipson. "I like to see a girl take to her book, but not too much study."

"And what do you read, young lady? I shall put you through an examination. First, what did you read at school?"

"Do you mean for study or amusement?"

"If I wanted to know about your *mistress*, or the principal, as I believe it is proper to call them now, I should say for study; but I want to know about *you*, and so tell me all about your own private reading."

"I used to read a good deal of history, which I am very fond of."

"What kind?"

"Well, I read nearly all Gibbon, which I found very dry, except some few parts; Clarendon's 'Rebellion,' and Guizot's account also; some Ancient History, and Hallam's 'Middle Ages.'"

"Upon my word, very deep literature for a young lady. And now tell me one thing; can you remember dates well?"

"Scarcely any, I am afraid, except the most important."

"I am glad to hear it. Generally persons can tell me the date of the invention of forks, or the introduction of apricots into England, and yet don't know that of the Norman Conquest or the execution of King Charles. Well, now try and give me your idea of the Romans."

Margaret paused a minute, and then answered with a smile—

“Brave—unprincipled—practical—good-humoured, and inclined to red tapeism.”

“Well done, young lady. Just as I imagined—clear view of generals with neglect of particulars. Well, I think we may pass you in history. Now then for poetry—fond of that?”

“Very.”

“What kind?”

“Nearly all. I have read Dante. I began him in Italian, but found that I could not follow sufficiently readily, and so I read Cary’s translation. I have read Tasso, and Milton, and Spenser for ancients; and all Scott, Southey, Rogers, and most of Tennyson for moderns.”

“I like your selection. Now tell me which you prefer of the first you mentioned.”

“Oh, Dante, certainly.”

“And why Dante, pray?”

“Because he has mastered his subject most entirely. He seems really to *see* what *they imagine*.”

“Upon my honour, young lady, you are not far wrong. I always said so myself. But you have read some light literature besides all this, I hope; your mind must need light ballasting?”

“Oh, Yes. I have read several of Bulwer’s novels; all Scott’s; Miss Edgeworth’s, and others, besides voyages and travels.”

“Well, well. Very good. I dare say you are surprised to hear me advise your reading novels. Of course, I don’t mean all kinds; but a little light literature, in my opinion, clears and relieves the brain, besides making one practical and ready for every-day work; that is, if the novel be a good one. None of your ‘nivelling, romantic, ‘murder and elopement’ style. Have you read Adam Bede, Miss Kate?”

“No, indeed, Dr.; perhaps I don’t read as much as I ought.”

“Well, I shall send it down to you; and if you are wise,

you will make Miss Margaret here read it aloud every day : you'll enjoy it after a few chapters—I know you will.”

“I have no doubt I shall like any book you recommend, whatever style it may be in. Have you been in Marbury lately, Dr. ; any news ?”

“Marbury is a place I keep out of as much as possible. It seems to know no medium between the stillness of utter stagnation and the excitement of a hive of bees upset. On a market day I am always afraid of getting stung. Of course, the present gossip there is the wonders of Margrove, which I believe is to contain in miniature all the beauties of Carlton House and the Pavilion together. Come, tell the truth Miss Margaret, are you not longing to see it finished ?”

“I certainly long to see Margrove again, but as it used to be, I fear I shall like it better, so as I remember it, than in its new state, however grand.”

“That's what your favourite Romans called the *genius loci*, and a very good genius too. I wish it were more commonly revered, and places left more as they used to be. However, this is an age of alterations. Well, Miss Philipson, here I came in for five minutes and have stayed an hour, beguiled by your pleasant society. I really am the most idle man. I must be off and see after a hundred things. Don't ring. Margaret will walk with me down to the gate, I dare say. Good bye. Come along you young Muse of history.”

And the good Dr. departed with Margaret as his guide.

“What a perfect night !” was his exclamation, on emerging from the house. “I always think August the most delightful month in the year. There is more *colour* in it than any other. Do you remember in Dante—

‘ So that where 'twas,
Aurora's white and vermeil tintured cheek
To orange turned, as she in age increased,’

and so on. It is in the Purgatorio, I think, Canto 2nd or 3rd. If you are ever up early enough to see the fun rise now, you will see how truly he paints. No poet like him

for truth. But take my advice and don't read too much. You are musical, I think, and play? Yes! Well, that is good, keep on with that; and I should like you to come sometimes with me and see the poor people I could show you. Mind, I don't ask you to engage yourself to regular visiting, and it must be regular to be of much use. What I mean, is to draw out your mind, and show you something of your fellow-creatures. Nothing like an occasional look at a poor man's cottage to teach one content, patience, and fortitude. Well, here we are at the gate, and so I will say good night. God bless you, my dear."

CHAPTER VI.

GAUNT HOUSE.

It is evident that Margaret and her aunts were on good terms. To tell the truth, there was so much intrinsic good in the sisters, that any one who would take into consideration a few peculiarities, and make allowances for one or two angles in their constitution, found no difficulty in making friends with them. Margaret was doubly endeared to them by the fact of her being Edward's child, and also from her being, as even they could not deny or disguise from themselves, somewhat neglected. Not that they would for one instant allow that he could be anything but the noble, generous creature they believed him. No! but, like most men of similar glowing feelings and impulses, he was apt to take his likings and dislikings; and then certainly Margaret's being a girl, and not a boy as he had so wished, *was* rather a disappointment—not that she could help it—poor girl. So reasoned the worthy pair; and in the meantime, they omitted nothing which might increase her comfort or tend to lessen the feeling of desertion she must naturally entertain. As they did not understand her father's prohibition of acquaintances to extend to their own small circle of friends, it was decided that she should be taken to call upon them formally; and, consequently, the fat pony, under the care of the equally fat John, was one morning called into requisition to convey them to call upon Mrs. Aston, of Gaunt House Farm, distant one mile. The pony had a habit, like many human beings we often see, of making a prodigious fuss about starting. To see him curvet and toss his head and paw the ground, you would

have thought he was some fiery hunter harnessed by accident, and ready to dash the four-wheel and its contents to atoms on the slightest provocation. But this desperate display soon funk down into utter laziness and slumber, and the consequent pace was about four miles an hour, from which no threats, entreaties, or caresses would arouse him. However, as Miss Anne said, "If he was slow he was sure," and the only thing necessary, was to make arrangements for the hour of starting according to his well known pace. When the excitement of starting had been allayed, and the sisters had well settled themselves, their parasols and card cases, Margaret thought to inquire who Mrs. Aston might be? Miss Anne, to whom the question was addressed, at once responded:—

"Aston, my dear, is one of the best names anywhere; and the Astons are a very old family. I think it is a Shropshire family, or—no, is it Suffolk, I am thinking of—at least I know there was an Aston there—don't you know, Kate? That man who shot himself—or was it his butler?—well, well, it doesn't matter much, my dear, but they are as old as the hills, and used to be very rich. They are not so now, however, for old Mr. Aston—this one's grandfather—lost all his money at the time of the French Revolution. I think Boney had something to do with it, and now Gaunt House Farm is all they have. They have had it for years, but did not always live there."

"Has Mrs. Aston any family then, aunt?"

"One son grown up, about, how old is he do you think, Kate? As old as Edward?"

"Yes, I should think so, Anne: he looks it quite."

With such talk as this the time was wiled until they arrived at Gaunt House Farm, which merits some description. Modern science and modern ideas have brought us to the conviction, that however picturesque a moat may be to a country house, yet it can scarcely be considered as a very healthy or convenient adjunct. Unless carefully attended to and cleaned, it is apt to contract masses of weed and mud, which do not tend to purify the air; and in addition to this, there is to careful mothers, the constant

fear of their little ones getting engulfed in its treacherous depths. None of these considerations, however, had prevailed with the masters of Gaunt House Farm to fill up the old moat which was their pride and glory. The moat had been made in the old times, they used to say, when every man's hand was against his neighbour; it had been cleaned out in the time of the Restoration, as the date on the bridge told, and no true Aston would ever be the man to fill it up. Certainly Gaunt House would have lost one of its greatest ornaments, had the hand of the modern improver been turned against it, and so we must conclude they were right on artistic reasons, though scientific principles were dead against them. The large straggling farm house stood on a square piece of land surrounded on all sides by water, though at the back it became little more than a ditch. In front, a low gateway, overgrown with honey-suckle and capped with some nondescript stone animal, in which might be traced a slight resemblance to a dog begging, but which was really the Bear and ragged staff, the cognisance of the House of Gaunt, yet bore the grove caused by the old portcullis, which had long ago perished. The drawbridge, too, had vanished these many years, and its place was supplied by a plain stone bridge of one arch, more suited to the peaceful character of the place. In summer, the moat was white with water-lilies, among the leaves of which the dusky forms of pike and carp could be seen slowly gliding along in shoals, or stopping to sun themselves in safety. An old, rotten canoe moored to the bank, showed by its worm-eaten sides and crop of weeds, how seldom those waters were disturbed. In front, the shelving banks were covered with roses, clove, gillyflowers, pansies, and Solomon's seal, which gradually declined in favour of cabbages, peas, and beans, as the corner of the house was turned, and ended in the regular kitchen garden at the back. The house itself was of all dates, from the massive fifteenth century erection of the redoubtable John of Gaunt, to the irregular farm buildings of the eighteenth century. It was, indeed, a mingling of cloth of frieze with cloth of gold; and the only bond of union which

kept the two elements in decent harmony, was the network of creepers with which the whole house was overlaid. French honeysuckle, clematis, passion-flower, and monthly rose, added fragrance to the attractions of a stately vine which shot far above them, and in autumn was loaded with its rich, purple burden, while the oldest portion was covered, and, in great part, held together by clusters of ivy, among which, peeped out the white blossoms of a stately magnolia. It may be imagined that the irregularities of art were of little consequence where nature had done so much. A rude wooden porch, the pillars of which were hung over with the bright tin utensils of the dairy, furnished with a heavy oaken, nail-studded door, leads into the interior. On the right of the stone passage is the kitchen and offices, on the left a large stone-flagged hall, once the great dining hall of the Lancastrian chieftain, but now modernised into a comfortable farm parlour or general room. The only relics of antiquity to be seen are the huge old dining-table with its accompanying stools, and a grim oil painting, let into the wall, representing a fisherman of very Dutch physiognomy drawing in a net well filled with chub and perch—the forefathers, perhaps of those which now rejoice in the moat. But this is not the only picture in the room, for on the walls hang several small sketches in oil, which show a refined taste and thorough knowledge of the art, and from their new and bold appearance, betray the present master to be no ordinary mind. The room is plainly and simply furnished with the ordinary requirements of a farm house. Windsor chairs, plain mahogany table, and antique bureau, suggesting pleasant ideas of pigeon holes, filled with bank notes and guineas. There is a large and well stored book-case, abounding in books on farming, agriculture, and a few legal works on the rights of landlord and tenant: these occupy the lower compartments, while above is a goodly show of lighter literature, consisting of history, travels, and poetry of all kinds, together with works of fiction and amusement. Before leaving the room I must call the reader's attention to a grand old screen of gilt and painted leather, shielding the cumbrous sofa from the draught, and pleasantly reflecting the blaze of the

hearth in winter time, though now the grate is polished to the highest extent and occupied only by flowers and peacock's feathers. A few pots of balsams and scarlet geraniums in the window seats, and a gracefully drooping iceplant flanked by paper fly-traps, completes the picture of this quaint panelled old room. From it you pass across a passage to the drawing-room, which is the more modern portion of the house. It is a large square room, prettily, though not expensively papered, and showing in the selection of the ornaments and furniture, an elegant and artistic mind. Here, too, are some more sketches, evidently by the same hand, and over the fireplace a portrait, which (although we have not yet seen her), I think we may assign to Mrs. Aston. A few books and engravings are upon the table, and in the centre a grand old china dish in which is placed a group of dahlias, magnolia blossoms, and fern leaves. Beyond this room there is evidently another smaller one which must look out upon the lawn, but this, I think, we must not visit yet.

Having dismounted, and left John to take care of the fiery Bobby, who was now quiet and panting—having, by huge exertions performed the journey of one mile in fifteen minutes, the visitors were ushered into the drawing-room, where they had hardly been seated, before Mrs. Aston entered. It was easy to recognise in her a specimen of one of the most charming characters which nature produces—a perfect old lady. She might be about sixty, but her quick light step and cheerful manner, led you to suppose her younger. Her dark brown complexion, small, delicate, aquiline nose, and deep tinted eyes, together with rich black hair, only partially touched by time, seemed to proclaim her of foreign extraction; and, indeed, her mother was a foreigner. Her quiet but rich black silk dress, simple collar, and plain gold brooch, showed the placid, unassuming character of their wearer. She warmly greeted her visitors, whom she seemed unfeignedly glad to see; and there was about her a quiet ease and grace of manner, which never failed to make those she conversed with at home.

The chief of the conversation was naturally directed

towards Margaret, as the stranger; nor, in so interesting a place, were topics of conversation wanting long.

"You seem to admire our rambling old house, Miss Philipson. I find most persons rather struck with it on their first view."

"The fact is, that I have been so long in London, that almost anything in the country has a charm for me. But I certainly never saw any old place which interested me so much. I like your garden exceedingly."

"Ah, I cannot claim any praise for that," said Mrs. Aston, pointing towards a part of the lawn covered with fanciful beds of various colours in the French style, "that is all Leonard's idea. I must confess I had the bad taste to prefer my old beds at first, but I am a convert now."

"Mr. Aston is away, is he not?" inquired Miss Kate.

"Yes, he is up in the north, I am sorry to say. He has business which often takes him away there, and then the house seems dull without him. Would you like to walk round the garden and see the moat, Miss Philipson?"

"Thank you, I should like it of all things. I have quite a weakness for flowers."

The four ladies passed out of the long French window and examined that part of the garden which had been reclaimed from the general confusion of flowers and vegetables. It was well laid out and showed much taste. When they had made the circuit, Mrs. Aston said with a merry laugh, "you must promise not to tell of me and I will take you where I have no business to introduce any one—Leonard's peculiar sitting-room and studio. But 'when the cat's away, the mice play' you know." So saying, she led them to a low arched doorway, massively studded with nails, which evidently belonged to the oldest part of the house. It admitted them at once into a little passage, from which a second panelled door opened into the room she had mentioned, and a most charming room it was, without doubt. The original oak panelling still remained, and over the fireplace was decorated with superb carving, black with age, and representing four knights armed and caparisoned, sitting on their noble steeds amidst rich festoons of fruit and flowers. The walls

were adorned with various specimens of ancient and modern weapons of warfare—pistols, swords, pikes, and helmets, arranged in contrasting order. A rich piece of curious old tapestry, portraying some hunting scene, looped back from the mullioned window, let in the light upon a huge dark oaken table heaped with books, papers, and painting materials. On the chimney-piece, the table, and in various other places stood vases of flowers, filling the room with their perfume and relieving the dark colour of the ancient carving. On the chairs, which were of all kinds—Gothic, Elizabethan, and modern, were littered huge folios, fragments of wood-carving and sculpture, shreds of tapestry, and various other curiosities. Facing the window was a noble portrait of Charles the First, under which was hung a sword belonging, apparently, to the same period.

"This is Leonard's favourite room," said Mrs. Aston, "to which, when I am well-behaved, he admits me sometimes."

"It surely wants putting tidy, does it not?" asked the matter-of-fact Miss Kate.

"Tidy? my dear friend; I only wish Leonard could hear you: he would have a fit from horror, I think. He abhors tidiness—at least in some things—and so I let him have his way here."

"Well, Margaret dear, I am sorry to disturb your reveries of delight, but we really must be going. I had no idea it was so late."

"Nor I, indeed," said Margaret, in amaze, as the hall clock struck the hour.

"Well Miss Philipson, I hope I shall see you again very soon. You know I am solitary now, and it will only be charitable to come and spend a long afternoon with me. We are only a mile apart. You must promise to come soon, and we will invade the studio again."

Such was Margaret's first visit to the Moated Farm.

CHAPTER VII.

VISITORS.

THE principle of division of labour was systematically observed by the sisters Philipson. Miss Kate had the sole management of all questions of finance and household economy generally, and might be styled the useful, while the gentle Anne, who undertook the decorative and æsthetic part, laid claim rather to the title of the ornamental. Thus it was Kate who looked over the accounts for the week, and checked them in a little brass-clasped and parchment-covered book. Kate issued certain sumptuary edicts against the excessive use of butter, meat, or sugar; and Kate it was who undertook and managed all the delicate negotiations and elaborate correspondence upon the departure of an old or arrival of a new servant. Thus she concentrated in her single person, the offices and functions of First Lord of the Treasury, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Secretary for the Home Department and War Office. She held monthly reviews of the household linen and plate, and dealt forth commendation or blame accordingly as the inspection was satisfactory or the reverse. She had a daily levee attended by the cook, the housemaid, and John the butler, gardener, and generally useful man; and if her orders and counter-orders were less voluminous and involved, they certainly were more felt and attended to than those of the War Office, or any other branch of the public service. Anne, on the other hand, had taken upon herself those duties which—to continue the parallel—belong generally in our constitution to the Chief Commissioner of Works, or the President of the Board of Trade. Hers was the task to

fee that the rooms were dusted, the beds turned down in time, and the door-step properly cleaned, though offences in these points had to be reported to her sterner sister, who wisely mistrusting Anne's tender heart, had reserved to herself plenary powers of punishment and forgiveness. Besides this, Anne had the regulation of the height of the blinds in summer—no light work when persons are anxious about the freshness of their carpets—together with the arrangement of the garden and adornment of the sitting-room with its products. In justice to the good sisters, I must say that this double system of government worked exceedingly well. Due deference was paid to individual feelings and wishes, and rarely did any more important question than the colour of new curtains or the choice of a hearthrug divide the house. On the arrival of their niece, however, there was a grave discussion as to which department she should belong, for an idle inhabitant of the cottage she must never be. Each sister put forward her respective claims upon her, and the knotty point, after much argument, was decided, as such questions generally are, by a compromise. Margaret, therefore, it was arranged, should be considered as Kate's *attaché* one week, while Anne should have the direction of her the next. In this way it was hoped she would learn both the utile and dulce, and in time become acquainted with the whole routine of household management.

One morning about a week after the visit to Gaunt House, the Misses Philipson were sitting unusually late at the breakfast table. Ten o'clock had struck by the little French time-piece and been echoed by the sonorous tones of the church clock, and yet the bell had not been rung for the breakfast paraphernalia to be removed. The fact was, that the carrier from Marbury had brought that morning a parcel and despatch from dear brother Edward. The letter, dated "Paris," told them, in what Mr. Philipson really thought was an affectionately playful style of correspondence, how much he was enjoying his sojourn abroad, what he gave for his apartments, and of his reception at the British Embassy, to which he had introductions, and

then went on to beg his sisters acceptance "of the accompanying trifle as a *souvenir* of his Parisian residence." The "trifle," which was elaborately packed and secured, consisted of a cheap and showy Bohemian vase for flowers, which he had picked up somewhere in the Boulevards for a few francs; but had it been made of emeralds and diamonds set in gold, and worth a thousand pounds, it could not have been more admired and rejoiced over by the worthy sisters. "So kind—so considerate—so like Edward," they were never tired of repeating, until Margaret began to think she really must have judged her father harshly in thinking him unkind.

"Is there any message for me, aunt Kate?" she asked at last.

"I think not, my dear," was the reply; "your papa doubtless was hurried. Stay, yes, here is something I overlooked. Oh, 'I hope Margaret is making the best use of her time, and employing her leisure profitably. I wish her not to forget her music, which appears to be the chief consideration now.' Very kind of him indeed, I am sure, to think of you, so far off and so much engaged as he is. I am sure you will follow his advice, my dear."

"Sister Kate," at length remarked Anne, "I really think we ought to ring and have the things removed. Do you know it is past ten?"

"Bless my heart, Anne, so it is. I had no idea it was so late. But this letter of Edward's has quite made me forget all. Will you ring, my dear, and then we can begin the morning's duties."

In a few minutes the table was cleared; and with firm step and head erect, keys in hand, and spectacles on nose, Miss Kate departed to hold the morning's levee and order dinner. At the same time, her sister, opening a drawer of the cabinet, drew forth a pair of sad coloured ancient kid gloves and her gardening scissors, with which she was wont to snip off the heads of withered roses, and wandering into the garden, accompanied by Margaret, in a few minutes was busily employed.

"Take care, my dear, take care. Do you not see your dress is crushing that heliotrope? I think you ought to

wear an apron tied behind when gardening. That is what I used to do when your age."

"Never mind, aunty dear, I will put a stick beside it. When did papa say he should leave Paris for Marseilles?"

"In a week or ten days, I think. I dare say they will be very sorry to part with him, dear man."

"Ah, then he will not be back till after Christmas, at all events. Perhaps not till spring. I suppose Margrove will be very pretty then. Have you seen it lately, aunt?"

"No, my dear, not for some months. It is a long way from here, you know, and it is generally your father who comes to visit us."

"Did papa wish me not to go and see it in his absence? I want to see the old place very much indeed."

"Well, it is very natural you should; but I think you had better wait for his return. He may be angry, you know. My dear, what are you about? You have broken that piece of fuschia fulgens, and pulled the tea-rose to pieces! What are you dreaming of, Margaret?"

"I really beg your pardon, aunt, I am very absent I am afraid. The fact is, I was looking at that carriage in the distance."

"Carriage? my dear, where?" said Miss Anne, all alert in an instant. "Yes, I declare, so there is. Do you look and see whose it is, your eyes are younger than mine."

"It is a pony-carriage, aunt, with a cream-coloured pony. Let me see, there is an elderly lady in it, and a gentleman driving."

"Cream-coloured, cream colour? Oh, good gracious me! it is Mrs. Trevennen and her son. I know they are coming to call, and I have never done the best room. Run! run, my dear, and tell Kate, while I draw up the blinds and tidy the room. Are they far off?"

"Oh yes, half a mile, quite?"

"Ah, that's well; then do you go into the room and open the piano, as if you were practising, or take in your colour box—it looks genteel to be surprised at some elegant employment."

So saying, the good aunt bustled off, struggling with her working gloves and basket of dead flowers. Margaret

went obediently indoors and began the arrangement of the flowers she had picked in the Bohemian vase, wondering who the Trevennens might be. In a few moments she was joined by her aunts, one with a piece of work in hand, the other with a book, and both endeavouring to assume a correct air of genteel langour and indifference, which sat ill upon their honest and sincere faces. Do not blame them, my dear reader. Have *you* never done the same, when nearly caught in your every day occupations by some great person of your acquaintance? It is only one of the stage tricks and movements of the great drama which is enacted every day around us.

Scarcely had they composed themselves in their respective places, than their visitors were ushered in.

Miss Anne was quite right. The party consisted of Mrs. Trevennen and her son, to whom it is necessary to introduce the reader. Mrs. Trevennen was, to use the language of the fashionable world, "very much thought of;" having, indeed, a double claim to this enviable position both as the widow of General Trevennen, of Peninsular and Waterloo fame, and a daughter of the house of Pendragon, which, though not abounding in worldly substance, was second to none in the particulars of high birth, breeding, and traditional pride. In the latter quality, at least, Mrs. Trevennen was a worthy member of her lineage. Poor as she was at the time of General Trevennen's offer (and few knew *how* poor that branch of the Pendragons really were, in spite of their gallant and haughty bearing), not Cræsus himself could have obtained the honour of her alliance, unless backed by a faultless and spotless genealogy. But General Trevennen was unexceptionable on that score, and had besides some three or four thousand pounds a-year, which was not a bad thing in itself. Accordingly, the nuptials of General Reginald John Trevennen, K.C.B., of Massingbury Hall, Gloucestershire, and Ida Winifred Pendragon, third daughter of Arthur Pendragon, Esq., of Carlyon Hall, Cornwall, were duly solemnized by two bishops and a dean, in the presence of a large and distinguished circle of friends, at St. George's, Hanover Square, and were followed next year by the announcement in the *Morning Post* of the birth

of a son. The old General had now been dead some years ; having left the uncontrolled management of his large estate to his widow, "in admiration of her talents as a woman and her virtues as his wife," as his will loftily expressed it. Accordingly, she continued to live at the Hall with her only son Arthur, who, having duly passed through the necessary steps of Eton and Christ Church, was now waiting for an appointment in the diplomatic service. He was a handsome young man, perhaps three or four-and-twenty, but with a quiet, almost melancholy expression, which made him appear older. What his real character was, the reader will soon discover ; but the fact of his regarding his handsome, haughty-looking mother with mingled love and dread was very apparent. Nevertheless, there was nothing of the milk-sop about him—it was only the reliance of a weak spirit upon one of firmer mould, and was accompanied with a filial reverence and touching respect in itself very charming. He formed a pleasing and striking contrast to that haughty woman of the world. Mrs. Trevennen had that exquisite polish of manners and suavity of deportment, which frequently accompanies high birth. But then it *was* polish you could see ; the elaborate gloss and lustre derived from art, rather than the noble natural grain of the wood—sometimes glistening, sometimes rugged and full of knots. It may, perhaps, excite some wonder, why this piece of fine porcelain should take the trouble to visit such ordinary clay as the Misses Philipson. The fact is, her society was made up of two orders, those who were *somebodies*, and those who were *nobodies* ; as to those who pretended to be *somebodies*, she was content with utterly ignoring their existence, and blotting them out of the book of creation. She, therefore, made no hesitation in paying occasional visits to the Philipsons, who, as she said, "*knew* their place," and nothing could excel the suavity of her manners in addressing them, or the tact with which she talked down to the level of their apprehensions.

"I almost doubted whether you would receive us," was her laughing remark on entering the room. "It is really a dreadfully early hour to call at, but the fact is, we *have*

talked of this visit so long, and so many things have hitherto prevented us, that I was resolved to take advantage of some business in Marbury to look in upon you. Is that your niece?"

"Yes, that is our niece, Margaret."

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Philipson," said Mrs. Trevennen, extending her hand; "let me introduce you to my son, Mr. Trevennen. I used to know your mamma, my dear, years ago. She was of an old Cornish family, and we were great friends as girls. She is very beautiful," remarked she aside, to Miss Anne.

"We think her so much like her father," was the reply.

"Indeed! I do not see the resemblance, in the least. But I really have seen Mr. Philipson so little, I am scarcely a judge."

"We heard from him only this morning. He is still in Paris, and intends soon starting for Italy."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Trevennen, in a tone which meant—"how can this possibly concern me?"—"ah, yes, I remember now, he went abroad some weeks ago. Are you musical, Miss Philipson? turning abruptly to Margaret, who was conversing with Mr. Trevennen.

"Oh, yes, I am passionately fond of it—it is my great amusement."

"Do you sing?"

"Yes—at least I have not much since I was here. I have played more."

"I am glad of that, for both my son and I are very fond of music: are we not, Arthur?"

"Well, I must confess that the greatest part of our time is passed at the organ or piano. Who is your favourite composer, Miss Philipson?"

"Mendelssohn, certainly. But I am not a bigot in music: I like all the best of Handel, Bach, and Mozart."

"That is well," said Mrs. Trevennen, with a smile. "You are for free trade in musical matters, I see, like myself. That is the only point on which I am not an absolute Tory. Arthur calls me sadly narrow in my political views."

"Do you know," said Miss Kate, in her gravest tones, "I have seen a great many governments in power and never

have been able to discover which is Whig and which is Tory. I know it is my ignorance, but still it is very puzzling."

"You are not the only person who thinks so, by any means," said Mrs. Trevennen, with a merry laugh, in which all the room joined her. "I believe it has puzzled many wiser heads than ours; but, nevertheless, we must support measures, not men; principles, not promises."

"Quite so," responded Miss Kate, although not much enlightened. "I have always heard that the Whigs supported Boney, and I am sure that seems un-English anyways."

While this political discussion was going on, Arthur and Margaret were deep in the mysteries of the *Lieder Ohne Worte*, the *Walpurgis Night* and *Athalie*, to which Miss Anne listened with wonder and delight. She began to think that she had not fully esteemed her niece's accomplishments when she saw how easily and gracefully Margaret bore her part in the conversation. Certainly Edward had cause for pride, rather than displeasure in his daughter, and she felt sure, that after his return, all would be right again.

At last, Mrs. Trevennen, who had passed from politics to household matters, began to think it time to depart.

"Come, Arthur, I know if I were not to stop you, you would talk on music till night—we really must be going. Miss Philipson, I hope to hear this conversation finished in our music hall in Maffingbury, where I trust I shall hear you perform some of your beloved Mendelssohn. Remember, I shall be glad to see you at all times; we are very close and near neighbours, and you recall your dear mother so pleasantly to me, that I could almost fancy myself a girl with her again. Good bye, Miss Philipson. Now Arthur, my dear boy, I am waiting for you."

"I cannot think how any one can call Mrs. Trevennen haughty," said sister Anne. "I am sure she is good nature and kindness itself when here."

"To be sure, my dear Anne, she has the discernment to see that we are not quite the common sort. For my part, I think Philipson as good a name as Trevennen any day. I have no doubt she will call on Edward now, when Margrove is rebuilt and finished. Ah, what a day that will be!"

CHAPTER VIII.

LEONARD.

PERHAPS the reader has wondered why so little has been said of Margaret's personal character, and is desirous of knowing something more of my heroine—for that she is—than the fact of her having golden hair and blue eyes. On the whole it is a reasonable request, and flattering withal, inasmuch as we do not care to inquire much after those in whom we take no interest. My silence, however, proceeded somewhat from a fear lest the reader should expect some perfect heroine of romance, gifted with superhuman powers of virtue, and endowed with rarest qualities and acquirements. If so, he will be disappointed bitterly. Margaret was not a perfect character. She was apt to take false, or at least mistaken views of things, and be proportionately disappointed when made acquainted with the realities. She was, perhaps, rather inclined to day-dreams and certain schemes of her own for altering the world in some respects, which her long absence from friendly sympathising minds had tended to encourage. But having mentioned these defects, I may dwell somewhat on her good points. The great charm of her disposition was its perfect openness and sincerity. Like the Venice glass which shivers at the touch of poison, so her nature instinctively recoiled from the suggestion of concealment or untruthfulness. She was loyal in her every thought and action, and despised nothing so much as meanness or faithlessness. A good basis this to build upon, and when to these is super-added the graces of affection and moral courage, I think we must allow that Margaret Philipson possessed the great

requisites of a fine and generous character. Still the keener and deeper the feelings are, the greater is the danger of erring by them, especially where they have not been allowed their full and natural play in the days of childhood, when the heart is so ready and free both in giving and receiving affection. It is scarcely wonderful, then, if Margaret at eighteen, when a new life seemed opening upon her, and all the prospect was tinged with the glow of early dawn, should indulge in reveries as to what this new existence might bring her, and wonder what her part in the world was to be. Dr. Evans who, from seeing her frequently, had gradually become acquainted with the power and originality of her mind, tried, and not in vain, to turn these speculations to some practical good. "Above all things, my dear young lady," he would say, "be practical. The true secret of greatness lies in not being above little things. I quite understand your state; you want to do some *great* good, and accordingly feel inclined to overlook the little opportunities of good which lay in your way. If you do so, depend upon it, your great intentions will fritter themselves away in empty wishes." Nor was the good Dr.'s teaching confined to words alone. Naturally fond of young people, in an elderly person a sure sign of a generous mind, he had taken a particular liking to Margaret, in whom he saw much that was good. Accordingly he followed up his oral teaching by means of such books as he knew were most calculated to improve and strengthen her mind, and in this manner gained a great and important influence over a disposition naturally both docile and inquiring.

One day she bethought her of her promised visit to Gaunt House, and resolved to put it in execution. A ready consent was granted by the aunts, and with the understanding that Mary was to be sent for her as an escort home, she started on her way. Gaunt House was, as I have said, about one mile distant from Northmoor, and a very pleasant mile it certainly was. The path ran through fields, at that time thick with the golden corn, and spangled with poppies and scabious. A gentle breeze swept over

the bending ears, and shook them with a soft murmuring sound. So charming was it, that Margaret perceived the old stone gateway of the Gaunt House Farm rise before her and betoken her journey's end with a feeling of surprise—almost disappointment—at finding the time passed so swiftly away. Nevertheless, the farm looked very lovely that day, nestled softly in the bed of shadow, cast by the tall poplars on the right. There was a gentle ripple on the surface of the moat which made the lilies rise and fall softly upon their watery couch. The pigeons were resting in the many-gabled housetop, occasionally cooing in welcome to some wandering member of their community, who came brightly white and clear against the deep blue sky, and even the ducks and hens quacked and cackled in a subdued sleepy manner, as though it really were too hot for laying eggs or finding worms.

Mrs. Aston was sitting in the porch, a book by her side, and a piece of work in her hand, to neither of which was she paying much attention; a great mastiff stretched out lazily at her feet, occasionally rubbed his huge muzzle against her pretty little hand, and tried to gain some mark of her favour. A low growl from Lion aroused his mistress, and made her aware of Margaret's presence.

"Ah, Miss Philipson, welcome at last," said she, cordially extending her hand in greeting. "Do you know, I really began to fear you were waiting for a formal invitation, and had serious thoughts of asking the Misses Turnbull, and Gregory, and Mrs. O'Gall to meet you solemnly 'and take tea.'"

"I am heartily glad you did not, Mrs. Aston. I am sure I shall enjoy myself far more alone with you."

"Are you then? that's right. Well, now you are come, we will try and make you at home. Will you go in, or join me out here in the porch?"

"Oh, the porch, by all means. The water looks so cool and the scene is so pleasant, that I think I should pass the greatest part of my time in the open air, did I live here."

"Here, Janet, bring a chair for Miss Philipson. There,

my dear, now sit down by me in the shade. Do you know I cannot compliment you very much on your looks. You seem faint and tired."

"Do I? Perhaps it is the walk. It was very hot. But I often feel tired and languid, as much from want of something to do as from over exertion. Do you not know that feeling?"

"It is one I have seldom to complain of, but very common at your time of life. I am always busy, mentally or bodily. You know the charge of this farm is a serious one during Leonard's absence."

"Is he away much?"

"Why, yes; he has undertaken the management of a cousin's property, which is up in Yorkshire, and he often has to go there and look after it. Indeed, I often say he is more careful of her concerns than his own."

"Is the work of a farm interesting? You know, Mrs. Aston, I am almost a Londoner; at least, the last eleven years of my life have been spent there."

"Interesting to one who has lived in the country so long as I have, and has so many pleasant ideas and memories connected with it. You will laugh, my dear, but I almost feel as if I were at the head of a large family, beginning, indeed, in Leonard, but gradually embracing all, and extending down even to Lion here, and the ducks and pigeons. It is a very wonderful thing to think how many families depend upon the work of such a farm as this."

"It is so; and I like your country term of *labourers* so much better than that of *hands* applied to your working men. *Hands* seems as if it meant they really had neither hearts, minds, or souls."

"That is what Leonard says. To labour, he says, is an honourable term applicable to all men, whether high or low. I should like you to hear his ideas upon the relationship of employer and employed. Some persons would call him visionary, but he is far too practical to deserve that. As far as his means permit, he carries his theories out into actual bearing. You must pardon a mother's weakness, Miss Philipson. I know I am not a fashionable mother,

for my son is very dear to me—perhaps almost too much so. But that reminds me that I have been very remiss in not before inquiring after the health of your aunts, nor have I asked you for your news from abroad.”

“My aunts are quite well, thank you, and send all kinds of kind remembrances. They heard from papa about ten days ago. He wrote from Paris, and seemed enjoying himself much.”

“You must long for his return, my dear, I am sure. I suppose Margrove is being rapidly transformed, so that we shall scarcely know it again. It is many years now, since I last was there—seventeen or eighteen, I should think.”

“Did you know mamma, then, Mrs. Aston, for she must have been alive then?”

“I cannot say I knew her very well or intimately. We interchanged a few calls. But what I saw of her, I was much charmed with—no one could help it.”

“My aunts say she was like me in face; but even they scarcely recollect her. Do you think she was?”

“She was paler and slighter, as I remember her; but otherwise, she certainly resembled you. I always heard her spoken of as very amiable, and regretted much that our living so great a distance apart, prevented our becoming more intimate. It is, indeed, strange that I should now know her daughter. Do you go much to Margrove to see the alterations?”

“I have not been there at all yet, for I think papa wants it to be a surprise to me when it is quite finished. I can hardly recall the old house, but I know I was very fond of it.”

At that moment Janet came to announce tea, and Mrs. Aston led her visitor into the little room I have before described as Leonard’s sanctum.

“My son allows me to use this room on condition of not disturbing any of his arrangements and messes. This I religiously observe, by using my own table, which is brought in for the purpose.”

The old-fashioned china tea service was laid out upon a little round table in the deep bay window. Strawberries just peeping out of a nest of green leaves, a bunch of

grapes and some downy peaches, together with real farmhouse bread and butter, formed the repast. Margaret could not help remarking upon the picturesque appearance of the room, which still retained its wild disorder.

"Old armour, and carving, and tapestry always call me back to the past. This every-day life of the nineteenth century is too hard and precise to please me altogether. It seems as if those grand old characters one reads of in Spencer and Tasso were gone for ever. There are no old knights now."

Mrs. Aston was about to reply, when her ear caught the sound of a horse's hoofs in the yard.

"Can it be Leonard," she said. "Impossible; and yet I thought I knew old Cavalier's tread."

At that instant a manly step was heard, the door was flung open, and Leonard Aston appeared on the threshold, and in a moment was clasped in his mother's arms. Leonard's was a very striking, though not, correctly speaking, a handsome countenance. A broad, massive, intelligent forehead, swept by fierce impatient curves of dark brown hair, and lighted by a pair of clear earnest grey eyes, changeable in hue as an opal, was the most remarkable part of his face. But his expression, though generally grave, was liable to frequent changes, like shadows of the clouds passing over some lofty mountain. On first looking at him you would pronounce his main characteristic to be firmness and resolution, forming that conclusion from the firm, sharply drawn mouth and massive chin; the next moment a playful light beaming in those grey eyes, and a smile breaking out upon the lips, showed amiability to be no small part of his nature. I do not mean to say that Margaret perceived all this upon her first glance. Only two expressions seemed predominant at that moment—love for his mother, and surprise, perhaps disappointment, at the presence of a stranger. Whatever he felt, however, there was nothing in his polite bow on introduction, that indicated anything but greeting; while she, for her part, beheld with surprise, instead of a man her father's age, as her partially judging aunts had led her to expect, the stalwart form and manly figure of

one who could scarcely have numbered more than thirty years.

"Well, Leonard, this is a surprize. I thought you miles away in the north."

"Ah! mother, do not talk of the north to me. I cannot say how glad I am to be out of those regions of smoke and gloom, and in a Christian looking country again. I should have been here yesterday, but I could not resist the temptation of wandering about Lichfield Cathedral, after Manchester noise and tumult."

"And how have you managed Sybil's business?"

"As I expected, there was no real difficulty. The tenant was very easy to settle, and agreed at once to my proposals."

"And Sybil?"

"Is the same impulsive, grand creature as ever. All life, and fire, and energy, but very strange and quaint. She talks of coming here some day."

"That's well. I long to see her again."

"Well, mother, and now you must submit to cross-questioning. How has all gone on?"

"Oh, as well as could be expected in your absence. Dixon grumbles that master goes away in the busiest time; but, I believe nothing important has happened."

"You have only lately come in this neighbourhood, Miss Philipson?"

"Only a few weeks. I like it much."

"You prefer the country life then, and yet nearly all your life has been passed in town?"

"Perhaps it is from contradiction."

"I trust you have a better reason for your preference?"

"Seriously, then, I think I only *exist* in town, but live really in the country."

"'Live,' in the sense of enjoyment or of labour, Miss Philipson?"

"Which sense do you apply to it?"

"I answer you in the words of Longfellow—

"Not enjoyment and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act that each to-morrow
Finds us farther than to-day."

"Then we agree, at least, in thinking enjoyment and labour to be compatible terms?"

"Surely, I should be sorry to think otherwise of some labour. But there is a labour which is simple slavery."

"What distinction then do you draw?"

"Simply this. From the fact of the mind being more or less employed, I apply the term labour or slavery."

"Not from the comparative exertion required?"

"Certainly not. Ploughing and sowing are more laborious occupations than picking oakum, but surely the first is preferable."

"Yes, a thousand times so. But still, there must be work of all kinds done."

"That is true; and hence there is work for all to do. Woe to the idler! Right labour or the faithful fulfilment of duty, is the only true condition of life. But I weary you with my disquisition upon labour."

"On the contrary, you interest me much."

"You are fond, then, of such topics?"

"It is only of late they have occurred to me: before I lived in books—I believe I am now commencing life."

"Scarcely so: you may have arrived at a new period, but your life commenced with sensation and reflection. Ideas then formed, remain long."

"I'll tell you what, my dear Leonard, you will talk of ideas until you will make Miss Philipson have most unpleasant ones of you. I shall not allow any more metaphysics. Have you nothing to tell of your Manchester adventures? Come begin."

"Adventures, oh I have had plenty, even in the nineteenth century. Manchester!" and he commenced a most ludicrous description of a scene that had occurred at the Sheffield station. His manner was extremely amusing and witty without buffoonery, and he had the art of describing things and persons in a few terse, well chosen terms that set them entirely and bodily before the auditor. He gradually turned the conversation from one subject to another, and so drew out the minds of those he was conversing with, never allowing it to remain too long on any particular point, so as to become wearisome. He had a clear, well-toned voice, and read

poetry remarkably well. His mother questioned one of his quotations, and to prove it, he turned to his copy of Shakespeare, and after reading the passage, was gradually allured to give the whole scene. It was a great treat to hear him; and Margaret's eager face showed how much she appreciated it, as did her look of disappointment at the announcement of the servant's arrival.

"You will let me see you home, Miss Philipson," said Leonard. He did not ask to be allowed, yet there was something very charming in that calm, masterful way in which he offered his arm and conducted her through the old court yard. She was not allowed to go without a promise of a speedy return, "on penalty," as Mrs. Aston remarked, "of being invited to meet the Misses Turnbull and Mrs. O'Gall at a formal tea." Need I say that the promise was not unwillingly given?

The evening air was soft and cool, and the perfume of the flowers sweet, as they walked through the long range of corn-fields. Leonard did not say much, and seemed thoughtful; and Margaret was too calmly happy to break the delicious silence. She appeared to be in a happy dream, and was fearful of uttering the word which should break the charm. But the longest mile has an end, and at length the cottage of the good sisters appeared in sight.

"Good evening, Miss Philipson, I hope we shall soon see you again at Gaunt House," were his parting words, as he left Margaret at the little garden gate. The words were cold and formal, but his face was not; nor was his expression a few minutes after, as he watched her retiring figure. He walked home slowly and in thought, nor was he much inclined for conversation on his arrival, but soon retired to his private den, where we will leave him for the present.

CHAPTER IX.

MASSINGBURY.

It was fated that Margaret's visit to Gaunt House was to be the beginning of a long course of similar dissipation. The next morning the village of Northmoor was astonished by the appearance of the Trevennen carriage, with what melodramas would call "two gorgeous menials," stopping at Rose Cottage, a very rare occurrence, as Mrs. Trevennen's good taste generally led her to employ the little pony chaise in her visits to "nobodies." The "menials" aforesaid, however, were the only occupants of the splendid vehicle on this occasion, one of whom descended from his lofty perch, being the bearer of a note to Miss Philipson. It was a knotty point for Miss Kate to decide which Miss Philipson was intended. Her conscience told her loudly that it was improbable that Mrs. Trevennen would write to her, while inclination suggested that it was not impossible, and thus the worthy lady was in a dilemma, honour forbidding her to open a letter which might after all be meant for another, and yet curiosity urging her on to inspect its contents. From this difficulty, Miss Anne was fated to release her by the admirable suggestion, that perhaps the best way would be to ask Margaret's permission to open the enigmatical letter in her presence, a concession promptly made by that young lady when informed of the circumstances of the case. The commencement—"My dear young Friend"—settled the question. Experienced, learned, discreet Miss Philipson felt she might be, but young at sixty she certainly was not. With a gentle sigh, therefore, she honourably handed over the tempting epistle to its proper

destination, with the cheering and consolatory assurance of having acted in a noble manner.

"My dear young Friend," the letter ran, "What are your engagements for to-day? If you have nothing better to do, will you come and pass the afternoon at Maffingbury and lighten our solitude with your presence? I have taken the liberty of ordering the carriage to call for you on its return from Marbury; but pray use it as your own, and consult your own convenience as to time of coming.

"Faithfully yours, IDA WINIFRED TREVENNEN."

"Very kind indeed, my dear," was Miss Kate's remark, upon perusal of the note, "and a great compliment to Edward. Of course you will go—it will be an excellent connection for you at Margrove, and your papa would highly approve."

"And you won't mind my going, aunt—you won't be dull, I hope?"

"Dullness, my dear niece, is a failing to which a refined and cultivated mind can never be subject, and one which, I may say, I am not acquainted with. With Dr. Johnson's works and the *Spectator*, my leisure will be fully employed, and in the most profitable manner."

"Besides, sister Kate," said the truthful Miss Anne, "this is the day when we were to make our preserves, and that, you know, will take a long time."

So, after such excellent reasons on all sides for going, it was settled that the Maffingbury invitation should be accepted; and accordingly, in due time, the splendid pair of greys had the honour of whirling along our heroine on the way to the Hall.

Shall you be very weary, my dear reader, if I inflict upon you a description of Maffingbury Hall? I begin to fear that I have a weakness for describing places in preference to persons and can only promise amendment for the future; but still Maffingbury is so far an important place, that I think I must run the risk of your displeasure and give a few moments to depict it. The huge iron gates of that remarkable type of solid ugliness, which seems necessary to English respectability, swinging back on their creaking hinges, the twin stone

griffins rampant, guardians of the portal look down upon us grimly, but not unkindly, as we enter, and lo! we are among the woods of Maffingbury. The aspens restlessly tofs about their slim arms with a shiver, as though they were burdened with a secret they long and yet dare not reveal. But they are cowardly, for the sturdy oaks look back upon them so calm and stately in their grandeur, and so unmoved withal, as if they would bid them take courage and be firm, while the tender drooping limes, with their sweet scented blossoms, speak only of calm and peace. There are elms, round which the ferns cluster, and which the ivy loves, and plummy horse-chestnuts, with their prickly fruit, while at a distance, a group of firs cluster together, being at what may be called a hobble-de-hoy age, having lost the tender beauty and down of youth, nor yet acquired the grandeur and hoar solemnity of the ancient regents of the forest. The "whirr" of the pheasant, and scud of the startled hare are frequent, and give abundant promise of a good season. One turn more of the winding road, and we can see the Hall, standing on a terraced slope and girt with a band of black-green cedars. I grieve to relate that the edifice, imposing as it is, is ill-suited to its grand position. Of course, it is dreadfully solid and expensive, and what would be called pure Grecian taste, having a pediment supported on eight Ionic marrow-bones and square-headed windows, gradated off from a very huge size on the ground floor to very small ones at the top, so small, indeed, as to suggest the idea of their being intended for dwarfs or very little people. On the terrace a few heathen deities wander about uncomfortably, and try to assume becoming attitudes, but they do not seem at home, and, possibly, are thinking how green and unwholesome they will look in winter. A large fountain with a group of tritons and dolphins, apparently disputing violently which way the water is to go, stands in the centre of the lawn, and all throughout the winter months suggests unpleasant, rheumatic ideas, while in the summer, the pipes generally manage to get out of order and sprinkle ridiculous jets of muddy water over any persons silly enough to come to admire. But the flower

beds and baskets are beyond all praise, and are sufficiently beautiful to atone for a Pantheon of deities. Beside one of these, Mrs. Trevennen and Arthur are standing, watching the head gardener, who tries to explain a plan of his for the improvement of the garden. At this moment the carriage deposits its fair burden, and they advance to greet Margaret.

"It is very good of you to come, Miss Philipson," began Mrs. Trevennen, "upon so short and unceremonious an invitation, and you could not have arrived at a better moment. Arthur and I are at issue upon a point of colour and taste. Will you be judge between us? We want to have a band of verbenas round the lawn, under the terrace, and cannot agree upon the colour for it. I say mauve."

"And I, red," interposed Arthur.

"It is a hard point to decide upon," said Margaret, "and so I think I shall suggest a compromise. What do you say to a band of alternate mauve, white, and red?"

"Miss has hit it," said the gardener, oracularly; "that's the very thing—no doubt of it. Look splendid."

"Now, then, the thing is settled, as you have Wilson's approbation, so your diplomatic suggestion has benefited us all. Will you come in and take your bonnet off, or walk round the gardens now, Miss Philipson?"

"I think the gardens look too tempting to be left, if you are not tired. How very lovely they are!"

"Come this way, Miss Philipson, and you will just catch our favourite view. Up these steps; there, now, is not that glorious?"

And, certainly, the prospect before them was fair enough to justify Arthur's high encomiums upon it. They were standing upon the upper terrace, from which the ground sloped continuously but gently, beginning with the flower-studded lawn, which almost imperceptibly became wilder as it approached the park and woods. Two avenues, one of limes, the other of chestnuts, the former at this season in full blossom, conducted the eye to the extremity of the wood, and led on to the lovely prospect beyond. Northmoor, with its picturesque cottages and antique spire,

nestled under the shade of the hoary woods of Maffingbury—a little glimmer of water to the right, just caught the gleam of the sun's beams and denoted the position of Gaunt House, while far on, and distinctly marked by the massive Abbey Tower, was Marbury. The whole scene—at any time one of great beauty—to-day, had double charms from the wandering play of the sun's rays, which alternately brought each detail into light, or softened it down into shade. Margaret stood long in delighted silence. Her eye ran on through all this maze of beauty to the slight eminence on the other side of the town, where she fancied she could behold the outline of her home. It must have been pure fancy, as, in fact, Margrove at any time could hardly have been seen from Maffingbury Hall, and just at present the new buildings scarcely showed above the ground. The powers of imagination and old associations, however, conquering these little physical difficulties were sufficiently strong to bring a quiet tear into our heroine's eye. Her companions wisely knowing how much the enjoyment of a fair view depends upon the the silence of the beholder, left her to her reveries, undisturbed by comment or remark, though both gazed with interest, *one* with undisguised admiration at her animated face. Margaret was the first to break the silence.

“How very, very beautiful this is! I have never yet seen a view I enjoyed so much. There seems every element here of a fair landscape; trees, water, rising ground, and picturesque buildings. Do not you sit here much, Mrs. Trevennen?”

“I do. Indeed I have attempted more than one sketch of it, but it requires a far better hand than mine to do it justice.”

Just then the house-keeper approached to speak with her mistress, and Arthur and Margaret were alone for a short time.

“How proud and fond you must feel of your old seat, Mr. Trevennen,” began Margaret, to break the silence, which Arthur did not appear ready to do.

“I am, indeed, very fond of Maffingbury, and have

always grudged the time I have lived away from it. I did not half enjoy Oxford, and was always longing to be back here among my favourite haunts. And I shall regret the time I have to be in London just the same."

"What, are you going to live in London then?"

"Perhaps you have not heard that I am to enter Parliament before long. I know that I ought to, but I cannot say that I much anticipate it: to spend all the best part of the year, when the trees and flowers are in full bloom, in smoky, dirty, dingy, old London, wasting one's nights in talking nonsense, and one's days in lounging and idleness."

"If *that* is your idea of the parliamentary life, I am not surprised at your disliking it. But, surely, it is not a necessary or unavoidable course of existence. Have you no ambition to shine in the House of Parliament—to be a grand speaker—and to lead a gloriously useful life to all around?"

"Ah! that is, indeed, a woman's view of public life, and I must acknowledge that I once used to long for it. But it is very rare, and I confess that now my ambition is of a different kind. I should like to live quietly and happily here, surrounded by my tenantry, whose comforts and welfare I might look after and care for myself. I often sketch out plans, perhaps rather Utopian, of such a peaceful life and the advantages of it. Do you ever indulge in such plans for the future?"

"Sometimes."

"I am so glad then, to find some one to sympathize. My mother always brings me down from my ideal by telling me to be practical. But I want all things poetical and lovely. I want to reduce them to their first state of innocence and beauty as they were in Paradise. Why should they not be so?"

"You forget one thing in Paradise," said Margaret, with a quiet smile—"the serpent."

"True," said the young man, and then added, with a somewhat deep blush and a lower voice—"but I did not forget another presence—Eve."

Just at this moment, fortunately for Margaret, who was somewhat at a loss what to reply, Mrs. Trevennen joined

them and proposed adjournment to the house, as the sun was growing unpleasantly warm. Whatever the faults of Maf-fingbury Hall were as to strict laws of beauty, it possessed internally, one great merit—comfort—and that one, not so common to “show” places. A very large and lofty entrance hall served to keep the house agreeably cool in summer, while (as it was fitted with a grand warming apparatus) it also became the focus of heat in winter. It was of the usual type—flagged with marble squares of black and white, and hung with certain family portraits of now dead Trevennens and Pendragons, who looked sternly down from the walls upon the degenerate race of the nineteenth century. From the hall, a splendid stone staircase led to the galleries and corridors above, which were decorated with stands of arms and some more family portraits. Doors, right and left of the hall, led into the sitting, dining, and music-rooms, to the latter of which Mrs. Trevennen conducted her visitor. It was plainly but handsomely furnished, and rejoiced in a rich collection of “all kinds of music,” from the stately organ at the upper end, to the elegant little guitar which reposed upon a sofa.

“Here is my favourite room, Miss Philipson, where most of my time is passed.” So saying, she seated herself at the noble organ, and commenced one of the grand pieces of Mozart. She played, not simply, well, or finely, but majestically, and drew volumes of sound from the fine instrument—at times pealing like musical thunder through the lofty room, and then dying in the softest notes of an *Æolian* harp. Arthur and Margaret sat in rapturous silence, and when she ceased, a low murmur of “exquisite!” from the latter, together with her eyes brimming with tears, not of sadness but of keen enjoyment and happiness, told how great her appreciation had been. Both Mrs. Trevennen and Arthur were eager in their requests that she would sing, and so with ready compliance, but, really, with a nervous palpitation, she sat down to the piano to obey. She chose the “Gondolier’s Adieu” of her favourite author, Mendelssohn, and threw her whole soul into the melancholy air upon which it is founded. Her voice was a high soprano,

possessing some of the deep notes of a contralto: liquid, mellow, and bird-like by nature, it had also all the advantages art could bestow in the way of training and management, and its great charm was the entire feeling and intelligence which guided each note.

"Don't think of rising, my dear," said Mrs. Trevennen as she ceased—"we rustics have not such a treat as this every day. You really must sing again several times before I shall feel the least satisfied." To this Arthur added his earnest entreaties, and, accordingly, song after song followed in quick succession, while no one took regard of time.

Arthur Trevennen was in his element. Enthusiastic and keenly alive to all the more refined enjoyments of sense, he felt in a kind of waking dream, and gave himself up to the intense pleasure of the moment. Nor was his mother less pleased. Though naturally of a rather reserved, haughty temperament, and adverse to the society of the ordinary run of girls, yet there was a simplicity and charm in Margaret's nature which had at once captivated one who hated anything like "missishness" or affectation, and she seemed to recognise in her the friend of her early days and be carried back over the lapse of many years. So occupied were the whole party, as Arthur and Margaret were singing one of the Two part Songs to Mrs. Trevennen's accompaniment on the organ, that they all wore a startled, not to say a guilty, look, when the door was thrown open, and "Mrs., Mr., and Miss Allam," were announced. A rustling and ponderous noise was heard, and there entered the three persons who owned the titles aforesaid. Mrs. Allam was a short, stout, consequential widow, of some fifty years or perhaps more, the prevailing expression of whose features was one of intense self-approbation—not vanity, mind, that was far too fidgety and bustling a quality to be possessed by the worthy lady or any of her name, but quiet, obtuse, intense self-satisfaction. She was one of those unhappy mortals who live by certain invariable, infallible rules of their own devising, and are the very Popes of their own households, and would-be Popes of their neighbours. She ignored the pettiness of anger—why should she be

angry when she was always in the right?—or envy—whom could she possibly envy, or with whom could she change places without losing? And the constant habit of cavilling at, and depreciating her neighbours, arose, not so much from a sense of *their* faults as of her *own* transcendent merits. Such was Mrs. Allam, and, it will be only fair to add, that there are many worse women in existence. Really kind-hearted, generous, and sincere, she would not have been an unpleasant woman had she only acknowledged herself mortal instead of infallible. Her son, Sigismund Oswald, and her daughter, Henrietta Maria were of the same type and character, though the difference of years made this preternatural “priggishness” (I must use that word, for it exactly expresses what I mean), far worse on them than on their respected mamma.

Sigismund was a tall, not bad looking young man, of some twenty-five years, but had spoiled his face by an ivy bush of a beard which grew round it like a halo, and gave him an unnatural gravity and solemnity of expression, while Henrietta, some five years younger than her brother, would have been decidedly pretty, save from a tendency to draw down the corners of her mouth into a settled sadness, condemnatory of all the world. This was very apparent as she entered the music hall and heard the duet and its fingers—for both her mother and she had settled that Arthur Trevennen, under her guidance and direction, might become a very worthy young man and husband when he had been weaned of some of his earthly vanities and follies. Mrs. Trevennen was annoyed at the interruption, and, I fear, showed it somewhat in the frigidity of her manner to her very unwelcome guests.

“I fear we disturb you,” began Mrs. Allam, “but it is an invariable rule with me to call early in the day. I *never* go out later than two o’clock, and by that means I preserve the afternoon for home duties and employments, which, in *my* opinion, are too much neglected.” She cast, as she said these words, a severe glance at Margaret, which plainly said, “What business have you here?” Mrs. Trevennen caught the look, and responded coldly. . . .

"A matter of taste. I should think it best to conform to the common usages of the world."

"I grieve to hear you say so, Mrs. Trevennen. I look upon the world as a corrupt mass rapidly approaching its final destruction. I *never* observe its rules when I think them wrong."

"Indeed."

"No : it is a point I feel strongly upon, and I have inculcated the same in my children."

There was a pause for a moment, broken by Sigismund, who, in a sepulchral voice inquired of Margaret whether she had seen the new work of Dr. M'Howlandcry, "Afternoon Groanings," and expressed much wonder at receiving a negative answer.

"A wonderful book, Miss Philipson—a truly wonderful book I assure you. One that will soon be found upon the boudoir of the ball-room beauty and the kitchen table of humble life."

The impatient toss of Mrs. Trevennen's foot, and a scarcely repressed curl of the lip, seemed to betoken the subject to be a dangerous one. Mrs. Allam was not entirely destitute of tact, and being also very full of management *alias* scheming, bethought her of a plan by which she might detach Arthur from Margaret's side, and bring him in closer contact with her own fair daughter.

"You have, I see, a charming new stereoscope, Mr. Trevennen; may I beg a sight of it." She said so not moving, and fully intending that he should fetch the article in question to her place, where she might have disposed of him as she chose. Arthur rose politely, and not only brought the stereoscope, but placed it, and fixed it at the proper focus. Obedient to a sign, Henrietta Maria approached to duly admire the Ducal Palace of Venice.

"Very neat, indeed," was her remark. "I always like architecture, it is so straight and regular."

It was hard to resist a smile, but Arthur not only did so, but responded—"Then you agree with Baillie Jarvie, who praised Glasgow Cathedral, because 'it had no curly wurlies.'"

"Who was Baillie Jarvie?" was the puzzled rejoinder.

"Don't you remember? in Rob Roy, you know; one of Scott's best characters, I think."

"Oh, a man in a novel," said the shocked Miss Allam, in the same tone as she would have said "the man in the moon!" "I *never* read novels. Mamma does not approve of them—nor do I."

Perhaps at this moment Mrs. Allam rather wished her daughter not quite so prudish and proper, for, alarmed at this uncongenial commencement, Arthur gradually fell back upon his old place by Margaret, with whom Sigismund Oswald was endeavouring to converse in what he believed an agreeable and edifying manner. He was too thick skinned to perceive that Margaret was not delighted with a conversation turning entirely upon the faults of the young ladies of his acquaintance, and the general regulations of the Allam household, however delectable these topics were to himself; nor did he observe how very wandering her answers were, until at last, on his inquiring where she went to church, her decided answer of "nowhere," recalled them both, to the great amusement of Arthur, who for some time had watched them. Conversation languished. Every subject became dangerous where so many had to be avoided, for all the family of Allams were so bound by Median and Persian unutterable rules of "never" and "always," that there were few topics which did not touch upon some tender point. At length Mrs. Allam rose. She had attained, as she thought, the end of her visit. Mrs. Trevennen had accepted an invitation to dine at some period to be afterwards fixed, although she knew not that that lady was already considering in what terms to couch her future note of refusal. Besides this, she had expressed in choice and well chosen expressions, her decided disapprobation of intimate intercourse between young people of opposite sexes, a hint, she had no doubt, but that Mrs. Trevennen would take; and so, having settled the affairs of the Massingbury world, she thought that she would go to her own dinner. Joyously did Mrs. Trevennen ring the bell for their carriage, and still more joyously see that vehicle depart.

"I breathe again," said she, in a Lady Macbeth style, and turning to the organ she executed upon it a brilliant impromptu fantasia, which she styled "The Deliverance." "Are not those Allams dreadful, my dear? Saw ye ever persons like them? Treble distilled essence of self-conceit and satisfaction. They live in a nutshell and call it the world, and denounce all who do not live by their red-tape rules. I shall not recover their presence to-day, I know."

"And how do you like the dear Sigismund Oswald, Miss Philipson," asked Arthur, mischievously; adding, "I thought he seemed most wondrously polite. I am sure you have made an impression."

"If I had, I am sure my last speech must have destroyed it. I thought he asked me whether I went to the play in London, and answered 'never,' and it seems he really asked where I went to church. He looked so terribly shocked and horrified, and I don't think he quite believed me when I tried to explain."

"Of course not, my dear," said Mrs. Trevennen, "those people never understand any explanations. They will be sending you tracts to convert you like a heathen or some such thing. There, now, let us have some music to put them out of our minds."

The afternoon passed delightfully with the resources of the music-room and gardens. Arthur was completely happy. He sang with Margaret—he turned over the pages for her; when they removed to the shade of the cedars, he read aloud some of the "King's Idylls," and then recited with a modest air, that well became him, some of his own poetry, which certainly was pretty and no more. His mother delighted to find him abandon his usual quiet reserve, drew him out by all the means in her power, and watched him with equal pride and affection. Margaret, too, was pleased—it was impossible to be otherwise—with Arthur, and listened with kindly interest to his not very remarkable poems. It is certain that there is no surer way to a man's heart than to praise some of his literary productions. It is a soothing charm to which the wisest and gravest are accessible; how much more, then, young authors

just budding, and keenly sensitive both of the sunshine of praise and the cutting frost of harsh criticism. It is not wonderful that Arthur gradually felt more and more attracted to his charming auditress, and hung more and more eagerly upon the soft accents of praise which dropped at times from her lips. The hours slipped by as if by magic, and the announcement of dinner took them all by surprise. It was rather a speedy meal, and was followed by a delicious lounge upon the terraced slope; nor did Arthur delay long in the solitary grandeur of the dining-room. But nine o'clock came, and with it the grave and stately Mary as Margaret's guardian. Mrs. Trevennen's adieu was most cordial and kind; nor would many have recognised the haughty mistress of Maffingbury as she pressed her lips to Margaret's forehead. Arthur, under pretence of suspicious characters supposed to be somewhere in the wood, obtained permission to accompany their guest as far as the gates, and so the trio started on their way. The time was passed by Arthur in discussing projects for the future, excursions, fishing parties, fêtes, in which Margaret was to appear. He seemed to look upon that day as the precursor of many such, and his sanguine, buoyant spirit refused to dwell upon any other future than his inclination drew. Had not Margaret been completely unsophisticated, she must have seen in the warmth of his farewell adieux, the expression of somewhat more than polite friendship.

CHAPTER X.

THE BROAD.

It is a perplexed and difficult question to decide whether individual life and character is ruled and determined most by the daily round of small and seemingly trifling events, or by those few fatal and important incidents which scarcely any existences are totally without. It is hard, in the business and turmoil of daily life, to estimate at their true value what we call "little things;" and it is only at its close, when we are able, as it were, to take breath and look back deliberately upon past events, that we are fully enabled to see the influence they have had over our life with its thoughts, its words, and its actions. But, nevertheless, it must be admitted that often a life will culminate, and take its decisive turn in one day—nay, in an hour. There are moments which contain and concentrate the destinies of individuals, perhaps through them of nations and the world, so subtle is the chain which connects mortals to each other. However difficult the question I have mentioned be, an author has generally to settle it for himself in a somewhat arbitrary manner. It must soon be decided which is to prevail, the smaller or the greater incidents, in the formation and arrangement of heroes and heroines, and I think the preference will generally be found bestowed upon the latter. For according to the minuteness of the chronicle will be the necessity of announcing "The Moated Farm, a novel in 1 vol.," or "a life photograph in 20 vols." Still there is a compromise, and of it I am about to avail myself on terms, I trust, as flattering to the reader as convenient to myself, namely, by making him, through

the use of his own imagination, part author with myself. Verily, this same imagination—yours, I mean, oh reader, of whom I am bound to suppose all that is good—is the true magician's mirror! What vision was ever yet denied to the potent spell of fancy? What form has ever yet refused to appear upon that burnished surface? Believe me then, good reader, there are many small details which you will sketch for yourself far better, and more to your own satisfaction, with your pencil tinged in the glowing colours fancy only can supply, than could I, labouring ever so hard with this creaking goose quill of mine. Let me ask you, then, to imagine the lapse of some six or seven weeks, and to fill in the gap with what you may very well imagine or wish to have occurred. You know the personages with whom you have to deal. Margaret and her aunts, Arthur and his mother, Leonard and his, Dr. Evans and the Allams, while I give you free permission to put on the stage any minor characters you please, so that they be not intrusive and troublesome. Life at Northmoor is quiet, peaceful, and to a certain extent, monotonous. The Misses Philipson had indulged in one or two pieces of dissipation called tea-parties, when the best room was solemnly taken out of its curl papers and coverings, when gaily bound books were mosaiced about the room, and chairs and couches set in conversational array. To these re-unions were bidden and came the good Dr., the Allams, Astons, and sundry spinsters of like tastes and age, with the sisters Philipson. The elder members in a state of cap and brooch, the younger ones airy in muflins, and gorgeous in fashes. No lack was there of entertainment in the corporeal and grosser sense, upon these evenings, although it must be allowed that the amusements were of the feeblest order. The seniors generally entrapped the rector for their whist table, at which he was a desirable and much sought for partner, though I must say, his mind was all the time among the younger people, to whom he would far rather have devoted himself. A little music, chess, backgammon, and what Miss Kate pronounced "instructive conversation," formed the amusements open to them; and the time, in spite

of Margaret's attempts at sociability, generally passed in alternate bursts of universal gabbling, and torpid moments of universal taciturnity. Leonard was a great resource. He could and would talk to any one, even the least inviting, and if there was anything within them, was sure to discover and bring it to light—he was consequently a general favourite, and only Mrs. Allam was inaccessible and unmelted by him. That good lady for certain excellent reasons had discovered and decided, that her hopes of gaining Arthur Trevennen for Henrietta Maria were not to be realized, and so, with diplomatic ingenuity, had now resolved on securing Margaret for Sigismund Oswald. Here again, however, her fertile mind discovered or invented a new bugbear in the shape of Leonard, whose intimacy and friendship with both aunts and niece, was to her equally undeniable and unpleasant. Sigismund did not seem to make much way with the heiress—not that she was in any way rude or haughty to him; she listened to what he had to say, answered it, and then took the first opportunity to escape from his side. The fault could not be his, of course—an Allam could not do wrong in any thing, from ruling an empire to tying a shoe string. It was evident then, that it was Leonard who, from interested motives, cast this glamour over Margaret's eyes, thus preventing her from a due perception of the merits and charms of the infallible Sigismund. Margaret then was far from dull. She saw much, both of the Trevennens and Astons, and frequently went to Maffingbury and Gaunt House, where she knew she was so welcome.

One bright warm day early in September, she was startled in her morning promenade up and down the garden, by the sound of wheels, and looking up, recognised Mrs. Aston in the pony carriage.

“Good morning, birdie mine; don't you wonder what has brought me here so early?”

“I am too pleased to wonder, Mrs. Aston, and I only hope it is to stay.”

“No indeed, my child, I am come to run off with you

'directly minute,' as the children say. Where are your aunts?"

At that moment the two good ladies appeared and greeted their early visitor.

"Will you let me steal Margaret, Miss Kate? I want her to come and spend the day with me over at the farm, and ramble over the harvest fields. You will spare her, wont you?"

"To be sure, Mrs. Aston, she will be quite safe in your hands. Will you come in and rest?"

"No, thanks, I can't stay a minute. Now Margaret, as you are."

"What, hatted and shawl-lets?"

"Aye, even so, you might be worse."

And so they drove off, leaving the aunts waving their handkerchiefs at the garden rails. It was a joyous drive—warm sun, waving trees, gleaming fields, and sweet scents, to say nothing of charming companionship, made Margaret enjoy it intensely. Then on alighting, there was Leonard just come in from the fields and leaning against the shadowy porch.

"Well farmer Aston," began his mother, "what business have you here at the most important time of the day?"

"I am come to look after my wild mother," was his reply, "who drives furiously through the country at early hours of the morning, and kidnaps young ladies, decoying them from their proper guardians."

"Bah, you idle boy; a very good excuse for your own voluntary laziness. Come, as you are here, and make yourself useful. We will go and see the fields presently. You must read, and sing, and play, and make yourself very delightful, for the day is too warm for anything else."

"How is Sigismund Oswald, Miss Philipson?"

"How is Henrietta Maria, Mr. Aston? You see I know to defend myself."

"Yes, ladies generally do; and how to attack also."

"If you are going to be cynical, I must go back directly."

"At your peril. Well I will be good for once. But I

think you are very cruel to poor Sigismund. You don't know how high you stand in his good books."

"Indeed? I should have thought his was the only name written there. Has he made you his confidante?"

"There you are mocking again. All the world is his confidante. It is plain to see that he is pining away in despair."

"Well, he takes a long time about it, that is all I can say. I hope when the process is over, that he will be more agreeable."

"Yes, that is all the pity he gets from you."

"Come both you silly children into the house this instant," exclaimed Mrs. Aston, "you will both have a *coup de soleil* in five minutes more, and that will spoil my day's enjoyment." So obediently they entered the old house, and were soon ensconced in the cool drawing-room. But here a fight met Mrs. Aston's eye, which disturbed her.

"Look here, my dear Leonard, actually no flowers," said she, pointing to the table which was generally decorated with a splendid china dish full of the choicest blossoms, but now looked strangely neglected. "This is the first time I have forgotten them for years. I really must repair this, and speedily. What shall they be, Margaret?"

"Why not water-lilies? Nothing would look so well or so cool this hot day."

"Alas! not one to be had from the Moat, they are all dying or dead," and drawing up the blind she pointed to the water which was covered by brown shrivelled blossoms of the once delicate lilies.

"Oh how sad," said Margaret, "my pet flowers all dying—I suppose it is the heat. How very sorry I am."

"I know where some are," remarked Leonard, roused from a reverie by these complaints, "and not very far from here—in the Broad."

"The Broad! where is that? What a romantic name," said Margaret.

"Yes, and a romantic place too, in reality. It is the name given to the stream which turns the mill not far from here. In one place about three miles off, it suddenly

widens out to some extent, and there these said lilies grow."

"Why Leonard, you might go there this afternoon," said his mother; "the skiff is here, and it would be delightful this warm day. I could not go, but you would like it, Margaret, should you not?"

"Oh yes, of all things. I have so often wished to go on the water."

"Very well," said Leonard, "then that is settled, and this afternoon we will go if you will trust yourself to my care. And now pay me my hire beforehand in music."

The afternoon came, and Leonard and Margaret started for the mill, the place of their embarkation. It was a very quaint and picturesque spot. The old mill, moss grown and lichen-covered, with its overhanging eaves from which sprung many a goodly plant of stone crop and wallflower, and where lay secure many a martin and starlings nest, and the rushing stream beneath, narrowing and approaching with headlong, eddying course, till it is ploughed up into yeasty foam by the cruel roaring wheel, and rushes out in frantic wrath and circling whirlpools, making the mill quake again in its wonderful course. The boat awaited them some way down the stream; and when once embarked, a few vigorous strokes from Leonard's practised arm took them far from the confusion of the mill, and among the placid weeping willows, drooping their boughs into the deep blue stream. For a few minutes neither spoke, then Leonard was the first to break the silence, as slackening his speed he said, "when do you expect your papa to return, Miss Philipson?" It was a sudden question. He had scarcely ever spoken to her before on the subject, and she was conscious that her voice trembled a little as she replied, "I hardly know, but I should not think before Christmas, or perhaps the New Year."

"His return will make a great difference to you—I mean that your life at Margrove must necessarily be unlike that you now lead at Northmoor."

"I am afraid so, and scarcely like to think of it. I have been so very, very happy here, that I cannot bear to think

of a change, and yet it is quite necessary and right for me, I know."

"I understand what you mean. But surely your living at Margrove will not entirely remove you from your friends, if you will allow us to call ourselves so.

"Indeed, I hope not. I should be truly sorry to think that I was never to see you all again. I have been very happy, and to that your dear mamma has contributed not a little. Oh, I hope I shall still see all my friends around me at Margrove, or I am sure I shall hate it." She tried to smile, but it was rather a melancholy attempt, and half compromised by a tear.

"Then you don't mean to forget us all in your new abode?"

"Forget? But no, you do not think me capable of such ingratitude. I can never forget dear old Gaunt House, never!" repeated Margaret, with energy.

"You are right. I *do* not think you capable or likely to forget; and yet how many there are who pass away and are caught with some new scene. Miss Philipson, I am not really cynical, and yet I have seen enough of ingratitude and forgetfulness to make me—did I give way to it—almost hate my fellow-men. You are startled at my vehemence I see," he added, with a grave smile, "but I do not often give way to it, and never *act* upon any principle of mistrust. You do not think me a gloomy sceptic, I hope?"

"No, indeed, but—"

"What does that 'but' mean? Something bad, I fear."

"Promise not to be angry, and I will say."

"I am seldom angry, and never could be so with you."

"Well then, I confess that I have sometimes thought that you do many things from duty without finding a pleasure in them."

"But can I help that?"

"That, you know, is beyond my compact to tell, even if I knew. But I think it shows that you rely upon your own schemes, rather than upon the capacity of your fellow-men to receive them."

Leonard smiled thoughtfully; he had been closely observed then, which made the implied censure not disagreeable.

"Perhaps you are right. I believe pride *is* my failing, and what you have mentioned is a characteristic of pride."

"Nay, I have not said that. You are not angry, then?"

"Did I not tell you that you could not make me so. I like to be rebuked by some people, and one of your grave remarks gives me something to think of. But where I trust I give no half confidence, and where I—" he paused for a moment, as if in choice of a word, and then continued, "I mean both the trust and the affection of those who are called proud, is generally deepest because bestowed rarely, and when given always with thought and deliberation." He was going to say more, but interrupted himself, as they came upon the Broad and the objects of their search. "Look, Miss Philipson, here are lilies enough to delight my mother. Do not reach yet. I will pull farther into the bank where grow the best. How very lovely they are upon their green leaves. Now then, let me steady the boat, and you can pull them in at your ease with this iron hook. Yes, that is the way."

With the firm grasp of his strong arm he steadied the boat, holding on to an over-hanging bough, and Margaret bent over, apparently in perfect safety, to draw in the floating blossoms. In perfect safety she would have accomplished it, but for two seeming trifles which ordered it otherwise. At the same moment that she reached out somewhat farther than prudence dictated, anxious to gain an out-lying bud, a wasp, or some such insect, settled upon and stung the hand with which Leonard was holding on, causing him to start for the instant, while the slight shock upset the frail boat and precipitated both into the river. Margaret sank directly, and, unable to catch at anything likely to afford support, was quickly borne by the current down the stream, with one faint cry for help. Leonard, better accustomed to the force of the water, recovered almost instantly, and with a fierce exclamation of despair and grief, struck out wildly in the direction he had last seen her; but

the cruel eddying bubbles which gurgled by him were all he could see, and an exquisite pang of anguish rang through him as it occurred to him that those very circlets of air might be Margaret's dying breath. He caught sight of some glimpse of floating garment as it seemed, and striking out again with renewed vigour, he gained the spot, to recognise a white handkerchief which he remembered she had in her hand when last he saw her. Calculating for the flow of the tide he dived a little lower down, and what was his joy to grasp with his hand those fair, golden locks he thought he had beheld for the last time, and return bringing Margaret to the surface. But how? That was a question he scarce dared ask himself, as he placed the slight form, dripping with moisture and twined with water-weed and some stray buds, which he feared had been her death, for even to the last she had retained her hold. How lovely she looked thus, and what a peaceful smile upon those features in life so animated and joyous. He chafed her hands and breathed into her nostrils with wild energy, refusing to give up hope. He called upon her again and again with frantic repetition, "Margaret, his dear Margaret!" but it all seemed in vain, and he felt overwhelmed, as the thought that she was really dead presented itself to his mind. Just then, as he was in the height of his despair, knowing the impossibility of aid, the sound of wheels along that usually deserted road, once more gave him a ray of hope. It was a cart returning from Marbury to the mill, and in less than five minutes, poor Margaret was deposited therein, resting upon some of the sacks, carefully disposed as a couch; and while Leonard drove at a furious pace towards Gaunt House, the carter, mounting the first horse of the team, dashed off in search of the nearest doctor. Mrs. Aston was a brave, stout-hearted woman; and when she saw the cart approaching with Leonard as its driver, though she knew at once that something terrible had happened, she did not cry nor faint, but went to meet him with ashen face, and heart almost refusing to beat from excess of agitation. Leonard's face was fearful in its expression, as he flung himself down and raised the prostrate

body of their guest. His lips were set and gnawed till the blood had started from them—his hair hung wildly down in a dripping tangled mass, and his eyes gleamed with an awful look of despair and self-accusation, as he exclaimed, "I have killed her." No time was wasted. A bed was prepared, and all that skill and good will could do was done, until the medical man they had summoned galloped up. His experienced glance soon informed him that there was yet hope, which was re-affured when he was told with what inconceivable rapidity all had happened. Yet the struggle between nature and death seemed long and dubious to all—ages to Leonard, who, shut out from the room, was pacing up and down the gallery in agonies of despair and remorse at what he deemed his handiwork. There was an old clock there, one of the relics of the antique part of the house, and in all his grief, some strange power seemed to compel him to listen to and count its monotonous "tic-tacs," until his brain seemed to reel again. When Mr. Clifton, the surgeon, at length came with the glad tidings that she was alive and likely to recover, his fervent exclamation of "Thank God, I am not her murderer!" was almost lost in the flood of hysterical tears, which now, at length, nature allowed to gush forth from his eyes. It was true. Margaret had the advantages of youth and a strong constitution, which alone enabled her to resist the fearful shock she had received. But it had been too violent to allow her recovery to be rapid; and, accordingly, the least noise or excitement was forbidden, as calculated to increase a tendency to fever, which, perhaps, might have fatal results. It was thought best, then, to convey the intelligence to her aunts at once, as her removal from Gaunt House was not to be thought of, and this office Leonard insisted on taking upon himself, as some slight penance or punishment for what he would regard as his fault. Bad news is unpleasant to convey at all times, but when it is the result of our own actions, it becomes hardest of all; and the traces of violent excitement and intense grief were so visible upon Leonard's face, as to prepare the Misses Philipson for any ill tidings. It was

conveyed in a few words, though there was a hard struggle in poor Leonard's mind between the natural fear of alarming and the appearance of cowardice and self-palliation in telling the truth. The effect it had upon the sisters was remarkable. Both grieved sincerely and deeply, for to both was Margaret as dear as a daughter, but the disposition of each manifested itself in their respective lamentations. Miss Anne, belonging to that school of the prophets who generally prophecy after the event, had felt assured all day long that some evil was to happen. A swallow had flown against one of the bed-room glasses and broken it; and then, too, Margaret—poor child!—had left her knife and fork crossed at breakfast, which was an unfailing sign. Amid her grief, too, was a very evident fear of what “Edward would say,” though this, her good-natured pity for Leonard, led her to repress as much as possible. Miss Kate pronounced it an “unfourtuitous concatenation of misadventures,” for the occurrence of which she trusted no one was to blame, as she entirely refused the responsibility. But the great disturbance and grief of her mind was evidenced in the strange disarray of her costume, when she came down to the carriage which had to convey them to Gaunt House, with two pairs of spectacles upon her nose, and a stray table-cloth wrapped majestically round her, having seized upon it in mistake for her shawl. She graciously tried to console Leonard by assuring him that she felt convinced “he didn't mean to do it,” and he was not to fret, as that would not make things right. However, on arriving at the farm, all things wore a better aspect. Margaret was much easier, and had fallen asleep, so the two sisters had only to devote themselves to preserving quiet, which they did mainly by walking creakingly about and uttering stentorial hisses, which Mrs. Aston afterwards told Leonard sounded more like kisses. And so this eventful day was brought to a more peaceful end than could have been imagined at one time; and at eleven the party separated, Mrs. Aston and Miss Anne to keep watch, Miss Kate to bed, and Leonard to pace up and down in remorseful, but on the whole, thankful reveries.

CHAPTER XI.

CONVALESCENCE.

MARGARET's recovery was slow but certain; and it was decided that she should stay for the present at Gaunt House, a plan proposed by Mrs. Aston and gladly acceded to by the invalid herself, while the aunts, to tell the truth, heard it with no less pleasure; for, as they themselves never indulged in indisposition of any sort, their nursing lore was not of a very extended kind, scarcely reaching beyond the old traditional salts and fenna, and brimstone and treacle, which they liberally dispensed to all the poor who liked to apply for them. So after staying two days, and mainly, as they believed, contributing to their niece's convalescence, they returned to the cottage at Northmoor, and left Margaret in the hands of her hostess, promising occasional visits until she should be able to come back. Those days of recovery are very charming when passed among sympathising and tender people. The little cares and attentions of friends have then a double charm from the reflection of how nearly one may have been deprived of them for ever. There is a dreamy haziness about the past, a chastened, yet pleasurable anticipation of the future, and a tranquil, placid enjoyment of the present to be found, perhaps at no other juncture of life, especially where the sufferer is young, and can only look with sorrow upon the death that might have been his. Need I say how tenderly and lovingly Margaret was nursed? Accustomed by a sad experience in former days to all kinds of sickness, Mrs. Aston was the very model of a patient, soothing nurse. But especially here, where mere bodily

exhaustion and mental excitement were all to be contended against, was her delicate and refined mind called into full activity. The pleasantest little bed-room in the house was allotted to her patient. A quaint apartment brightly papered, and hung with gay old-fashioned chintz, the intricacies of whose flowered patterns, Margaret often would amuse herself by trying to trace and evolve as she lay in that blissful state, half-waking, half-dreaming, peculiar to illnesses, resulting from a violent shock to the constitution. In one corner stood a huge old coffer, dark with age, and rich with carving, which perhaps had been used as a wardrobe by John of Gaunt or some of his bold retainers. A huge well-cushioned arm chair, with outspread inviting arms, suggesting pleasant ideas of repose, stood there, and by its side was placed a little fairy table, daily adorned with a vase of elegant flowers—not lilies—which cast a fragrance over the whole room. The window was embowered and overhung with the drooping wisteria and passion flowers, the monotonous tapping of whose tendrils, as the wind swayed them backwards and forwards against the diamond shaped casement, often soothed Margaret into a delicious sleep. This window, too, was the favourite resort of the pigeons early in the morning, and they would walk slowly up and down the ledge projecting beneath, and return to coo, and peep in on the invalid with their bright red eyes, with a loving greeting. When I add to this, the pretty little book-stand filled with most tempting volumes, which ultimately made its appearance when Margaret was pronounced able to profit by it, it will not be wonderful that this little fairy chamber was long impressed upon Margaret's mind. She was kept at first very quiet. Mrs. Aston would sit by her bedside and read in a soft, soothing voice, which generally had the desired effect of sending her gradually off to sleep. But for some time, no one but Mrs. Aston and her aunts were permitted in the sick room—it was feared that the sight of Leonard might bring back to her the late peril from which she had escaped, and this, at present, was to be avoided. So poor Leonard had to chafe

in secret impatience, and console himself by daily preparing and sending the bouquet for her room. But at length his desires were gratified, and Margaret was not only allowed to sit up in the great arm-chair, but to receive visitors. The meeting between them was a strange one, and very different from what either had expected. Both had prepared little speeches with much thought and elaborate composition—on the one part apologetic, on the other thankful—which they both were to utter as mutual greetings; and had they been intended for an operatic *scena* or sentimental charade, nothing could have been more to the purpose, or have elicited more bravos and bravas. But it happened otherwise. Margaret was leaning back in her invalid chair, dressed in an airy muslin robe, and with her golden hair rather tossed off her very pale face as Leonard entered and advanced with a nervous palpitation very unusual to him. In a moment speeches were forgotten in the deep impromptus of real feeling, and Margaret simply extended her hand, which he pressed with a very unnecessary and unusual grasp, but in absolute silence, for both felt at that moment far more than mere words could convey, and wisely trusted to the better understood but tacit language of the heart and eyes. Mrs. Aston relieved them both from their embarrassment, coming to the rescue with some lively remark which soon brought on general conversation. But in a few days after, when Margaret had progressed so far as to move down stairs and even talk of departure, she felt that she owed some words of thanks to the man who had saved her life; and one day when sitting under the shade of the trees in front of the farm, the approach of Leonard gave her the desired opportunity. A bright, warm blush overspread her face as she began—“I cannot leave you and Gaunt House, Mr. Aston, without my warmest, deepest thanks for what you so bravely did for me. You must have thought me most cold and ungrateful to have said so little before; but sometimes we feel more than we can express in words, and my only fear now is, that my manner should seem cold. Believe me, I shall never forget your courage and self-devotion.”

“And I shall never forgive myself for the fearful peril into

which my folly and rashness plunged you. So far from deserving your thanks, I need your forgiveness for my unpardonable folly. I can only hope that what I have suffered in mind may be some atonement."

"Pray, do not say so. You should not indeed think that—what happened was impossible for you to foresee or prevent. No, I feel, and always shall think myself eternally indebted to your courage for my life and safety. What an extraordinary sensation that of drowning is! Do you know that up to a certain point my thoughts and mind remained to me in a most wonderfully acute manner. I can now remember the blinding feeling the water had as it closed over me, and the sickening rapidity and roaring noise with which I was carried along by the current; and yet, even then, when I was helpless at the bottom, just before I became finally insensible, I knew perfectly, and actually *saw*, all that had happened. I could see right through the water all above me, though then it was choking me. But the fearful part was the last. In one minute I seemed to be able to behold the whole of my life. Every word I ever said, every thing I had ever done, and every thought that ever passed through my brain, seemed to rush back upon me and crowd themselves with fearful distinctness into one brief moment of agony. And yet I was utterly unable to pray, or even think a prayer, though I knew I was dying! And just then—just I suppose as you dived and found me, I became insensible. It is an awful feeling to have—actually (as far as feeling is concerned) been at the point of death and yet to be alive, and able, in some measure, to recal the impressions one then had. No, I shall never forget from what a death you have saved me."

Leonard's self-accusing spirit, perhaps, also, we may add his pride, would not allow him to accept these flattering thanks, but he would not excite Margaret by prolonging the subject, and so, after a few deprecatory words, he said, "And so you are going to leave us, Miss Philipson?"

"Indeed I fear I must have troubled you sufficiently, and it is full time that I should go back to my aunts who will begin to expect me. But I shall never forget Gaunt House and all its kindness."

"I am glad you like it so much, for my love for it is quite enthusiasm; my mother and my old house are the two objects of my love and devotion."

"I am not surprised. You are, indeed, happy in your dear mamma—that is a privilege and advantage which has been denied me, you know."

"I do know and regret, for the love of a mother is one of those things which nothing else replaces. I should have been utterly desolate without it. You know my father died while I was young, and since then my mother has been my entire, indeed I might say, only confidante; and has helped and assisted in all my schemes, in a manner I could not have expected from one so much older, and whose opinions on most points were already formed."

"I know you do much upon your farm: Mrs. Trevennen was speaking of it to me as a model in every way."

"I do not think it that, far from it; but I certainly have tried all in my power to improve the condition of my men and their families, I scarcely know with what success. But *that* I did not consider—it was my duty."

There was a rather melancholy accent on the last words, and Margaret repeated the word "duty" thoughtfully, and then said half to herself, "is not duty pleasure also?"

"Seldom," was Leonard's instant answer. "The mere performance of a duty certainly brings a satisfied feeling to the conscience which its neglect would not give, but the act itself is often far from pleasurable. Do not mistake me. I fear that you, like others, exaggerate the little I have done, and think that it has been undertaken from pure philanthropy. It is not so. I am not sufficiently fond of my fellow-creatures to do so, perhaps not as fond as I ought to be. But my labours were begun to fill up a void in my own heart, and have now been continued from a sense of duty and duty alone. I fear this sounds very unamiable, does it not?"

"No, not unamiable, but rather sad. I do not think I should like to feel so."

"You will not, at least, judge me harshly, I am sure. You cannot tell, for very few know, what I have suffered

to make me feel as I do. I thought at one time that all feelings of trust and love were lost to me for ever. Nay, do not look so alarmed. It is not so with me now. Time has done his usual work, and though I believe that I can never recover my first buoyant ideas and early sunrise colours of my landscape, yet I may truly say that I have learnt patience, and, I hope, have no unkindly bearing among my fellow-men. Of late, indeed, I have felt more than this, and have almost hoped—" But, apparently, he thought it better to keep his hopes to himself, for he stopped in some confusion, and abruptly changed the subject, nor did Margaret venture to renew it. The next day, on the evening of which she was to return to Northmoor, Mrs. Aston reminded Leonard of an old promise to show his portfolio of sketches, and the three adjourned to the sacred studio, which, from the frequent visits of the ladies, began to wear a somewhat tidier appearance. It was a very great treat, and one rarely afforded, for in general, Leonard disliked their inspection much, and could only be prevailed upon to exhibit a few trifling views, mostly of the surrounding country. They consisted of foreign sketches and scenery with a few careless compositions, which, if they exhibited less trouble and patience, showed the extraordinary resources and inventive power of his mind. In them, a close and imaginative observer could read the gradual development of his mind and character. The earlier compositions were mostly studies of sunrise and daybreak color, and were painted with an intensity and depth of feeling, which proclaimed a joyous and peaceful spirit. All was light and sweet, though joyous color, while lovely groups and wayside incidents of travel, showed the tender sympathy with the little joys and sorrows of humble life. There came a change, and it was evident that now the sketches were of actual places, and those, too, exercising a mighty power and spell over the artist's mind. A certain Italian villa made its appearance again and again. It was given under every effect of light and shade, and there was a fond dwelling upon, and reiteration of certain features of it, which showed how deep an impression they had made. A balcony trellised with jasmine, a flight of

time-worn stone steps leading down to a terraced walk shaded by cypresses, were the favourite subjects of the pencil ; and Margaret longed to ask, and yet some strange feeling withheld her from inquiring where the original was —she felt that some history was attached to them which had best be left undisturbed. Again a change took place. No longer fragrant jasmine or moonlit terraces—no longer peaceful villas and smiling landscapes—no longer light, and colour, and joy. All now was dark and gloomy. A nameless grave, with moss-worn headstone, cross, and some scattered bones, shone out strangely upon the summit of a lofty cliff, which the sea gradually wore away with its ceaseless dash and foamy waves. A few tall stone pines, just touched in places by the silver of the rising moon, were bowed and shaken by a storm which raged around, and lashed the sea to fury. Another sketch, equally powerful and gloomy, represented a man fleeing from a deserted house. He was just seen entering a forest, the trees of which were groaning under a very tempest of wind. Some horror seemed to possess him, for he looked not back, as though fearing a sight too dreadful for mortal eye ; and the winds were howling round the empty mansion, the windows of which were just illumined by a flash of lightning, and all seemed a waste of despair. It was an awful picture, inspiring gloomy ideas, and Margaret involuntarily shuddered as she put it by among the others. The next series consisted mostly of English views, and betrayed little else than an artistic and cultivated mind. The struggle, whatever it had been, was over, and Leonard seemed able once more to contemplate nature under her ordinary aspect. But the bright early sunrises and mid-day splendours were gone ; and though the sky was no longer overspread with clouds and darkness, or the sea tempest tossed, yet the placid rustic scenes where all was so still and motionless, showed the re-action of a heart which had preyed upon itself and now took refuge in the ordinary still routine of life. Margaret was entranced and enraptured by the inspection of the sketches, and yet she rose from them almost regretting that she had seen them. They seemed to contain so much sadness mingled with so much that was

tender, that the prevailing feeling was one of pity and compassion, and unconsciously the heart entered into and sympathized with the griefs and sufferings of the artist. One thing was remarkable, the absence of female figures in all the later works, which, indeed, almost marred some of them. Once, in the villa scene, Margaret had nearly remarked how well a figure in white would relieve the dark mass of cypress foliage, but on looking up to Leonard, who was standing at some distance, silent, and apparently abstracted, she observed an expression of deep-seated grief on his face, which betrayed how far away the picture had carried his thoughts, and fearing to touch on some painful subject, she was silent, only venturing upon a few expressions of admiration and pleasure. The day gradually wore away amid a general silence and gloom, which to a stranger would have conveyed the impression that Margaret was about to depart to the North Pole instead of the snug little cottage at Northmoor, distant one mile. She naturally regretted to leave a place where she had received so much kindness and which was now connected with an important event in her life's history. Mrs. Aston was grieved to miss the bright, loving companion whose society she had of late so much enjoyed, and for whom she felt so sincere and deep an affection; while Leonard, whatever might be the nature of his thoughts and reflections, showed an unmistakable depression of spirits at Margaret's approaching departure. They had had of late many opportunities for intimate conversation, and twenty times had he appeared upon the point of making some disclosure, some revelation which might, perhaps, have changed—in whatever way—their mutual positions. But as often as the words seemed ready to burst from his lips, some after thought would come upon him and stop the speech he had commenced. But, nevertheless, his manner was very tender and kind, though melancholy, and, perhaps, reserved, and the few earnest words of adieu he uttered as the pony carriage, under the guidance of John, conveyed Margaret away from the many peaked gables of Gaunt House, long continued, and not unpleasantly, to ring in her ears.

CHAPTER XII.

MARGARET AND HER THOUGHTS.

If, my dear reader, from the heading of this chapter you expect one full of love-sick sentimentality, containing a full, true, and particular analysis of the mental condition of my heroine's heart, I can only say that you will find yourself much mistaken, as nothing is farther from my thoughts or inclinations. The human heart, generally speaking, is a shallow and yet muddy pool, and the few pearls it may happen to contain, are frequently so overlaid and coated in mud, sand, and slime, as scarcely to repay the unfortunate diver for his pains and search after them; while, on the whole, the only pleasure or advantage derivable from the diving and raking process, appears to be the besmirching one's neighbours with the mud, sand, and slime aforesaid—a favourite delectation to many minds, though one I have, at present, neither the time or inclination for. But, besides this, I have two excellent reasons for declining any intimate analysis—firstly, I question whether I *could* probe the mysteries of love in a manner satisfactory to the reader; secondly, even if I could, I doubt whether it would do *him* any good or make him in any way the wiser or happier. The fact is, my dear reader, male or female, if you have been or are in love, you will know well enough how Margaret felt; if you have not, words of mine will only be wasted in trying to make you understand it. Some little insight into her thoughts and feelings, perhaps it is my power to favour you with, if you, for your part, should think it worth your while to peruse it and sympathize with her.

I suppose it is a habit, more or less common to all to

meditate over and recal the events of the past day, during the process of preparing for repose. It certainly is very natural, for at that time, persons thoughts, actions, and words, neglected in the busy hum of the day, come before one with a distinctness and accuracy to be found perhaps at no other time, to which the stillness and calm of the hour contribute not a little. Then it is that judgments are formed of the past and resolutions for the future entered upon; then we see, for a short period at least, somewhat of the true and real appearance of things and persons, which the glare and confusion of day, the hum of conversation, and the feverish activity and routine of life prevent one properly grasping and appreciating. The drama of the past day, with its scenes, mirthful or sad as they may have been, rises up and passes before us. Each player acts his part again, nor is our own absent from the number. As in a glass we see ourselves projected on our memory, and recognise each appropriate thought and word more or less truly according to the degree of candour with which we are willing to behold ourselves. I believe that I shall neither be accused of profanely prying into or rashly revealing the mysteries and sanctities of the female toilette, if I express it as my opinion, that this process of reflection and meditation among ladies, is generally performed during the time they are accustomed to give to the operation of brushing their golden or raven locks, as the case may be. Whether there is any remarkable connection between the apparatus of brushes, and combs, and bottles, and the powers of reflection, I shall leave for wiser heads to determine, contenting myself with the bare fact as it is.

Let us have a peep at Margaret now, this soft autumnal night, as she sits alone in the cheerful little room her aunts have allotted to her. The evening air is fresh but not damp, and the French window is only half shut, so as to let in the delicious perfume of the roses with which it is shaded. A few of the same fragrant flowers adorn the table at which she is sitting, and near them is a book—Dante, I think, but I am not sure—which she thinks she has been reading. She certainly looks very pretty in her snowy muslin wrapper

shaded by a soft, glittering flood of golden hair which falls round her as a veil. One little hand grasps firmly an ivory brush with which she has been smoothing it, and one tiny foot peeps out in its fairy slipper, the quick movements and play of which, reveal the abstracted state of Margaret's mind.

In good truth, her thoughts are occupied deeply enough; nor are they of a disagreeable character, if one may judge by the smile that occasionally half beams out and lights up her face. She has been asking herself the reason why the last two months of her visit to Northmoor should have passed so rapidly, and so like a delicious half-waking dream, as compared with the first few weeks.

"It is not any change in my aunts"—so her thoughts ran—"they are just the same kind, old friends; nor have their manner to me altered in the least. It certainly cannot be Dr. Evans alone who has made this difference, for, after all, we do not see him so often as we did; nor can it be my frequent visits to Maffingbury, though they are very pleasant. No, it must be Gaunt House, and Mrs. Aston, and (after a mental pause), and Leonard. The time always passes quickly where he is. He is so clever and thoughtful, and, certainly, speaks so well—always a reason for what he says. How handsome and noble he is: I am sure he must have been like Percival of the "Round Table," tender and brave, calm and earnest; and how good he is to his mother—how she must love him. Ah, if he were a brother of mine!" Be candid, Margaret: are you quite sure it is as a brother only you would like Leonard Aston? Look at the white little hand nervously grasping the brush—look at the little foot nervously moving within the velvet slipper. Surely all this agitation is not simply about a hypothetical brother? No. Presently the brush is dropped, the foot stilled, and the half smile bursts out into a deep, bright, comely blush over those fair features. The soliloquy is resumed. "No, it is *not* as a brother I should like Leonard. Yes, I love him sincerely, and I begin to think that he loves me. He has been so tender and gentle of late, and so much with me. I love to hear him speak, and I think he likes talking to me. I understand him, and I think he comprehends me; and yet,

I always feel as if I had said too little or too much. I cannot say all I feel when I am with him, but I could listen to him for ever. How very tender his manner was when last we parted after my accident; and then, too, when he said, 'No one is perfectly self-contained—the best part of them is to be fought out of themselves in some other heart. I always thought it and now I *know* it.' How earnestly he looked at me. Leonard, I am sure you are my best part—you look a very tower of strength fit for such a poor, weak creature as I to lean upon. But I will not deceive myself. It is scarcely possible that he should love me, so clever and good as he is. His manners to me are different from those of any other man I have seen—no flattery or foolish nonsense of that kind; but he seems to know one has a mind, and to delight to draw it out. No one can help loving him, and I—yes, I love him dearly." Well done, Margaret! You have honestly probed your heart, and found out that little secret you have tried in vain to conceal from yourself. Go to sleep now and dream of your dear Leonard. Perhaps if you were clairvoyant, and knew the thoughts of others, your sleep would not be so sound.

It was not very wonderful, after such reflections and discourses overnight, if Margaret decided next day to call upon Mrs. Aston. Nearly a week had elapsed since she had left the hospitable Gaunt House, and yet she had neither seen nor heard anything of or from its inmates, which certainly was remarkable, as, for a long time before, scarcely a day had passed without either the farm or the cottage receiving a visit. She had felt very dull, though she would not own it to herself, as it seemed ungrateful in the highest degree to her kind aunts, whose attentions to her had been redoubled since her late narrow escape. A variety of little things combined all day long to prevent her putting her design into execution; but at last, as she was despairing of an opportunity for her projected visit, Miss Anne unexpectedly opened the way by asking her to take Mrs. Aston a pattern for knitting, which she long ago had promised her. Margaret gave a ready assent, and soon was on her way. The mellow softness of the evening air, the pleasant walk, and above all, the happy

thoughts and memories in which she was indulging, in unthinking innocence, made her path seem short. She went fully trusting to the picture her fancy had painted, and with the confiding peacefulness of a fresh young mind at peace with itself and the world. The farm was in sight soon, and as she approached quietly and almost noiselessly, her eye was startled by a sight certainly unexpected, perhaps unwelcome. Under the shade of the tall poplars which grew in front of the house beyond the moat, were walking two figures in close and earnest conversation, so deeply engaged as not to heed her approach as she reached the last stile of the home field. One, it was easy to see, was Leonard, and the sight brought a smile of pleasure with it. But who was his female companion? Some one Margaret had never met, but a figure and countenance which once seen was not soon to be forgotten. She was tall, erect, and exquisitely made, with a fine classic-shaped head, set on a slender, graceful throat. Her complexion was a clear, bright olive, with a slight, warm, dusky tinge, indicating good health and much exposure to the air. A pair of clear, grey, hawk's eyes, shaded by long dark lashes, gave light and vigour to her face, and by their fearless, unflinching gaze, spoke of courage and spirit, as did the firm, well-shaped chin of resolution, or the broad forehead of openness and generosity. Her very dark brown hair was short, and though parted in the middle, hung on either side loosely like a boy's, giving her a rather daring and decided look. Her costume was simple but striking. A dark grey silk dress, ornamented with black velvet, and relieved by costly embroidered cuffs and collar, was well contrasted against a ribbon of vivid flame colour, to match which she had placed a pomegranate blossom in her hair. There was something in that firm, decided step and easy gait, which told of one accustomed to command, and she looked well paired by the side of Leonard's noble form. So well paired, that even Margaret was obliged to confess it to herself, when the sight I have described came upon her. She paused at the stile, irresolute, and her heart began to beat somewhat tumultuously. She wondered who this handsome stranger could be, and as she admired the

queenly port and noble form, a sudden inexplicable pang came over her. What was it? Jealousy? No; no feeling so base ever had influence over Margaret's mind. Anger? Pique? Distrust? Well, perhaps, none of these individually, but rather a tinge of disappointment, very common to those who have worked themselves up to a certain pitch of expectation and desire, and then suddenly come to a check. Her hesitation was only momentary. "What a child I am," she thought to herself, "afraid to go forward. Afraid—of what? How ridiculous it is. Why, a person would think I had committed some crime which had made me thus cowardly." So saying she moved on, and in a moment attracted the notice of the pair whom she had been observing. They both looked up, Leonard with a slight colour rising in his cheek, his companion with a curious scrutinising glance of inquiry.

"Good evening, Miss Philipson," began Leonard. "Let me introduce you to my cousin, Miss Sybil Clare."

His manner was calm and almost cold as he uttered these few words, and poor Margaret felt checked and thrown back again, and was conscious as she acknowledged the introduction with a bow, that her manner was somewhat confused and strange. Not so Sybil. With her grand, decided manner she advanced, frankly extending her hand, and looking inquiringly into Margaret's face as though she would read her very thoughts. Apparently she was satisfied with the scrutiny, for she grasped her hand warmly and said—

"I am very glad to know you, Miss Philipson. I think we shall be very good friends. I have heard a great deal of you, and always said I should not be contented until I knew you."

Margaret murmured something about "pleasure, delighted," and so forth, and then asked in a more intelligible way whether Mrs. Aston was in.

"Yes," replied Sybil, who took the conversation upon her own hands. "Come with me and we will find her."

She gave a slight, almost imperceptible bow to Leonard,

as if to say, "you have had your turn, now go," and taking Margaret's arm led her into the house.

"Did you know I was coming? pshaw, how silly of me, I forgot that no one knew of it until I arrived. I delight in taking people by storm in this way. That is *some* people, for it would not do with all, you know. But *here* I am always sure of my welcome. Is it not nice to feel at home, and really without ceremony? Ah! here is my aunt. Look here whom I have brought you, aunt."

"Some one I am always very glad to see, and just now more than ever. My child, what has become of you? We have all wondered, except Leonard, who pretends never to wonder, and feared something was the matter. You don't look blooming—sit down and rest yourself."

"Come here, Miss Philipson, and sit in this easy chair. No, not by that window; there now, that is it. I can see you are fatigued."

Sybil disposed of her as easily as a child, with a gentle violence.

"My object was to bring you this pattern, Mrs. Aston, from aunt Anne; she says it has been promised long."

"Thanks, very much, dear child. I expect that your walk is almost too far for you. You must remember you are not as strong as this lioness Sybil, who can walk miles without fatigue."

"Nonsense, aunt, I am far more accustomed to riding than walking, though I am not a bad hand at the latter either."

"You visit and teach in your school, do you not, Miss Clare?" said Margaret, feeling that she ought to say something.

"Yes; teach and am taught. My days contain a little of everything, riding, driving, reading, writing, Theology, economy, and politics. All very amusing and edifying. I have, I am told, some of the old northern energy in me, which makes us so much more vigorous than you enervated southerners."

"I won't have the south attacked," interrupted Mrs. Aston, shaking her finger at Sybil. "We do a great deal

down here in our way, only our way is different. I shall set Dr. Evans at you, rebellious one. I am sure he has energy enough for twenty people."

A discussion ensued, in which Margaret joined, though somewhat languidly; nor was she sorry when her escort home was announced. Both Mrs. Aston and Sybil protested loudly against her departure so soon, but she felt too jaded and tired to care to stay much longer, and soon made her adieux. She could not help feeling hurt that Leonard had not appeared after their first greeting, and went home in a mood somewhat different from the bright expectancy of heart in which she had quitted it. But she had learnt a useful though unpleasant lesson, not to reckon too surely or largely upon the events of an evening, as this night's disappointment had taught her.

CHAPTER XIII.

SYBIL.

PERHAPS the reader may bear in mind that in an early part of this history a certain female cousin of Leonard Aston's was spoken of—Sybil by name, the business of whose property had taken him that journey into the north. Properly speaking, the title of cousin was one to which Sybil Clare had no legitimate right, inasmuch as she was only the daughter of Mr. Edward Aston's wife by a former marriage; but she had always lived with her new father, and, as no children followed his marriage, was looked upon and treated as an Aston, and his daughter. She was very young at the time of her mother's second match—too young for any foolish or wicked person to instil into her mind suspicion or jealousy of her future step-father, even had her mind been one easily to receive such poison, or her father's character to warrant it. So far from it, she was always treated with indulgent fondness by both parents—fondness which would have ruined a less noble nature, but which had no other effect upon her than to develop and intensify to its highest degree a disposition at once strong, resolved, generous, and tender. Sybil Clare's was no ordinary mind, and needed no ordinary treatment; but the principles and rules which the adoring love of her parents were less qualified to bestow and inculcate, the sudden removal of both of them within a few weeks by death, and the consequent necessity of placing the young heiress under the hands of an experienced friend and governess, in time effected. Leonard's father, on the death of his brother Edward, was at first disposed to invite the young orphan to reside at

Gaunt House, and share his wife's love and care with Leonard, than whom she was younger some four or five years. But on second thoughts—partly lest the censorious world should suppose him to have designs upon her future wealth—he decided that it would be better for her to be placed in the hands of some elderly lady who might be to her both governess and guardian. Nor was he long in making his choice, for he found in Mrs. Atkinson, whose name was endeared to him as the instructress of his own sisters, the very person he required, and at once secured her services. He could not have done better. Of a mature age, but yet retaining the elasticity and freshness of the youthful heart, of a clear, shrewd, and well-stored mind, and of a loving, affectionate disposition, she was the very person most fitted to have the care of the eager, earnest Sybil. With her, she met with no harsh rebuffs or vapid replies to the inquiries of her keen and searching mind. Her doubts and questionings, which to an ordinary person might have seemed like unnatural scepticism, and in such case would have been checked by reproofs or parried with idle generalities, were at once patiently listened to, candidly answered, and ever taken advantage of to lead to some practical result. The native, impulsive generosity of Sybil's character, which inclined her to a profuse and somewhat indiscriminating charity, was now regulated and applied in such manner as to do good both to giver and receiver, while the mind of Sybil, by being led to calculate in no mean or niggard manner, how best her bounty might be applied, was at once educated and enlarged. On the same principle did Mrs. Atkinson proceed in her ordinary studies. Her inquiry into the principles and reasons of what she read was in every way encouraged, nor was the labour thus involved in itself vain or without interest. Often Sybil's shrewd remarks would open up a train of thought which showed the mine of wealth hidden within, and made the lesson both amusing and instructive even to the instructress herself. Mrs. Atkinson's pupil was certainly a rare jewel, and in a splendid setting, for she possessed all the advantages of great personal beauty. Her fault—I mean her principal

fault—for like most grand characters she had many minor ones, was a certain haughty impatience which characterized her movements. Perhaps I should have said “impetuosity,” for haughty in the bad sense of the word, Sybil was not. Literally unconscious of her great beauty, and caring little for her wealth save as the means of doing good, she took no pride in either, and her nature was far too noble to condescend to that miserable vanity which can wound by an unkind word or glance those less fortunately placed in the world. Nothing could exceed her gentleness and tenderness to the poor, the suffering, the miserable, even as nothing could surpass the whirlwind of scorn and contempt with which she regarded anything mean, cruel, or faithless—for these she had no mercy. But the very generosity of her nature made her placable and forgiving of offences against herself, as well as bitterly repentant of those committed by her against others; and where she had unjustly given cause for pain or sorrow, she rested not until she had confessed her misdemeanour and endeavoured by all the blandishments and little attentions in her power to atone. It was impossible then for two natures so excellent and remarkable as these to be together without mutual attachment and friendship, and nothing could surpass the love and affection, mingled with reverence with which Sybil regarded her governess. When she had attained a fitting age, and her education appeared finished as far as what she could bestow, and that was not a little, Mrs. Atkinson suggested that the time was come for them to part, and that henceforward her uncle would be the most fitting person as her guardian and protector. But this, Sybil would not hear of, or bear for a minute, nor would she be pacified with less than her dear friend remaining permanently with her, insisting upon her retaining her honourable position and direction of the household, and lavishing upon her every mark of love and attention she could bestow. So it was finally arranged to the entire satisfaction of all parties, that Mrs. Atkinson and her ward, as she was called, should continue to reside at Brancepeth Grange, from which it was very difficult to tempt the young heiress to stir. Her

devotion to the place was remarkable, and partook of that fiery intensity which marked her every action. Nor could a place be found more likely to take deep hold upon such a lively and imaginative disposition as Sybil's was. The Grange was a fine old mansion of the time of James I., deep porched, bay windowed, many gabled, the fantastic roofs and chimneys of which formed a conspicuous and picturesque feature in the pretty little village of which it was the chief house. It had for years belonged to an elder branch of the Astons, and their armorial bearings were to be seen in every place, carved in stone and wood, stamped on the huge leaden pipes, and painted in the old hall or state room; besides which, family portraits of such Astons as had been conspicuous in the court or camp, adorned the walls, and shared them amicably with a few representations of the Clare's, Sybil's own family, which she had, with some difficulty and trouble, managed to secure. Her situation at Brancepeth was strange. Quite young, and yet in the possession of no small wealth, which in so retired and simple a place seemed unbounded, she really occupied the position of squire, the title of which in her laughing moments she would sometimes claim. There were few families near at hand, the neighbourhood mostly consisting of large farmers, who kept almost exclusively to themselves. But the want of society was not one to disturb or annoy Sybil, for her resources were so entirely self-contained, that she cared very little for the ordinary interchange of small tittle-tattle, and conventional politeness which generally obtains in the world. Yet she was no recluse or ascetic, her disposition was far too generous for that; and on the few occasions when she either received or joined her friends, she threw herself with such hearty sincere *abandon* into their amusements and occupations, as to make her a universal favourite. But these occasions were rare, and her usual society consisted of Mr. Ellafon, the clergyman of the parish, an energetic, clear-sighted old bachelor of some fifty years, with whom she was a kind of pet, and who was of much service in directing and applying her many charities; and a few old ladies, simple, honest souls, who, making no show or fuss, were in reality wonders of goodness and sterling sense. Her habits were of that kind that her strong character and vigorous disposition

rendered likely, almost necessary. She had a bailiff; it is true, but, nevertheless, although with perfect trust in his honesty and probity, she made it her practice to superintend everything herself, from the felling a tree—always with her a painful duty—to the operations of seed time and harvest. She might be seen day after day mounted on her stout, active pony, and dressed in a queer short grey habit, which was to her what the *redingote* was to the “Little Corporal,” her hair confined in a net and surmounted by a small felt hat, galloping from end to end of the Brancepeth estate, attended by her two favourite terriers, Crophi and Mophi, directing, ordering, and superintending all. Many were the pauses made at the various cottages on her route—many the donations of such things as their various necessities demanded, and still more numerous were the prayers and blessings which followed her on her way. She had the art, the rare art, or gift, as it may rather be called, of understanding and thoroughly appreciating the character of our rustic poor, especially the north country people to whom she was most accustomed; she could perceive and grasp the real honesty and independence which lay hid under an indifferent, almost repellant demeanour, and her plans for their welfare were carefully designed for the level of their capacities, instead of summarily expecting them to rise to the tone of her own ideas and wishes. With her active mind, and constant occupation, mental and bodily, she had no time for weariness or ennui. Her mornings were given up to such duties as the bailiff thought necessary to be attended to; her afternoons were generally devoted to long excursions or drives with Mrs. Atkinson, or if the weather proved unfavourable, to reading, painting, or some such amusement, while the evenings, for the most part, were occupied by a Night school she had established in the village of which she was, under Mr. Ellason, the principal teacher. In this way, the time passed away happily enough, interrupted only by occasional visits to a few of her relations, one of which she was now about to pay to Gaunt House where she always knew she was most welcome both to her aunt and her cousin Leonard, for whom she entertained a sincere regard. And so it came to pass that very shortly after Margaret’s return to Northmoor, Sybil suddenly made her appearance at the old farm.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEE.

“SISTER Kate, I have done it!”

“What have you done, Anne?”

“What? why, my counterpane, to be sure;” and as she spoke, the worthy lady, her face beaming with emotion and honest pride, held up the last strip of an elaborately knitted counterpane. It was a great moment—such a one as does not often happen in a lifetime—and Miss Anne Philipson felt accordingly. The piece of work aforesaid, the completion of which I have just chronicled, had been her favourite employment for some two or three years, and the solace and resource of many a long hour. It was connected somewhat with the history of Northmoor, for there was scarce a man, woman, or child in it, who had not either heard of, inquired after, or seen this wonderful counterpane. It had been, in the disjointed form of diamonds, taken to every social party the place afforded, as Miss Anne’s genteel employment, and had formed an invariable, and, indeed, principal topic of conversation wherever it appeared. The pattern had to be explained, its beauties expatiated upon, and its mysteries communicated to those who sought them in a proper spirit. Thus it had become so indelibly connected with the name and fame of the gentle spinster, that she had more than once expressed a sentimental resolve to go down to the grave in its folds as her winding sheet. And now it was finished, all but the mechanical part of putting together, and Miss Anne looked upon it, tearful, though triumphant, with just such a look as Penelope must have cast upon her web, supposing that early wonder of needlework ever to have been completed.

Miss Kate looked up, and her congratulations were tinged

with a slightly jealous pang. She felt that her sister had achieved fame in a manner to which she could not aspire—her energies being given more to little dabs of wool-work of sickly hues and grim patterns, began with goodnefs knows what intention, but never fated to be completed. So there was a rather bitter accent as she observed—

“And a very good thing too, Anne; it is quite time it should be done, and has been long enough about, I am sure. One could never get a word from you with those nasty 1, 2, 3, 4, and such countings.” But here sisterly sympathy came in, and she went on—“Well, I am very glad Anne, and I suppose so are you.”

“I don’t know whether I am more glad than sorry: it is like parting with a dear”—she was about to have said “child,” but substituted “friend,” as more proper. “But now there is the sewing together to be done, and oh, Kate, I could never do that alone. Do, pray do, let us have a Bee to do it.” She grew rapidly eloquent, hoping by fluency and swiftness of attack, to overwhelm the torrent of objections which she saw Kate ready to pour upon her.

“You know we ought to ask the Allams to tea soon, and the O’Galls and the Clarkes, and we couldn’t do it in a better way. It’s a nice, lively amusement for all—old and young; and besides, Kate, it sounds so well, and wouldn’t take much trouble. Oh, Kate, do think of it.”

She stopped and the elder of the maiden pair began—“A Bee, sister Anne! I am not quite sure whether it would be decorous for a counterpane; and besides, it would be a great deal of trouble. A Bee, Anne! I am sure I don’t know any one who would come—the world is so changed from what it used to be! A Bee! well, I don’t know I’m sure; I fear it would turn the house upside down. A Bee!” repeated she for the fourth and last time, “well, perhaps, it wouldn’t be such a bad idea. I’ll see about it.”

A fortunate incident occurred which ordered the fate of the Bee and decided Miss Kate’s mind in its favour. Just then Dr. Evans happened to call.

“What’s that you say you’ll see about, my good lady,” began he; “better do it at once, without seeing at all.”

"Why, to tell the truth, Dr., I want your advice upon a difficult subject. Do you, now, consider a knitted counterpane an indelicate thing?"

"Certainly not, Miss Kate. I should think I sleep every night under one, and can say that I never yet have considered it indelicate."

"Then that takes a load off my mind, for sister Anne here has just finished her counterpane and wants to have a Bee, but I doubted whether it would be decorous."

"Have it by all means, my dear lady. I have the greatest affection for Bees; and if you will ask me, I will inaugurate it with a speech."

That settled it. So turning to the expectant Anne, Miss Philipson said decidedly—"Sister, we'll have the Bee."

"Well now, you must settle who is to come," said the good-natured Dr., always ready to enter into any scheme for innocent amusement; "you must arrange all that quickly, and invite some good workers. Here, let me write them down for you."

Miss Anne was triumphant—the Bee would have ecclesiastical sanction. Just at that moment Margaret came in, and she exclaimed joyously, "Only think my dear, we are to have a Bee!" Margaret had not heard of this custom, and was naturally puzzled.

"A Bee, aunt! But you have no hives, have you? What shall you do with them?"

"La! child, I mean a Bee to finish my counterpane."

This did not help matters, nor was her niece much wiser than before, for she exclaimed, "But aunt, what *do* you mean? How can a bee or any bees help to finish your counterpane?"

"Bless the child," said Miss Kate, looking on in grave amusement, "she is thinking of a real insect bee. A Bee, my dear niece, is a title commonly given to those social female gatherings occasionally held for the improvement of the mind by social intercourse, while the bodily energies are directed to the completion of some large product of—of the needle, or—" (in want of a word to finish with gracefully and appropriately) "or the knitting pins. The name is,

doubtless, derived from the busy activity ordinarily observable in those little insects, who are regarded as the types of industry. I believe I have given an accurate derivation, Dr., but I submit it to your superior judgment."

"Accurate and eloquent, my dear lady, and admirably to the point. Now, my good Margaret, you are fully acquainted with the nature of Bees, so pray do not confound any of the good ladies with those stinging insects you appear to have been thinking of. Now, Miss Philipson, to work. I hope you will admit some males—best policy, I assure you—or they will be all dying of curiosity to know what is going on."

"But won't they be in the way?" suggested Miss Anne.

"Not a bit—I'll answer for it. Besides, you know they need not come to the work, or only just at its finish."

So that was one point settled. The males were to come to tea. Miss Kate then began to dictate her list.

"There must be the Allams three, and the Aftons three, for we must ask that Miss Sybil Clare, I suppose. Have you seen her, Dr.?"

"No, but I have heard enough to make me wish to see her, so I am glad she is to come."

"Well, then, we must ask the two Misses Twigg, that's how many—ladies I mean—six and ourselves, nine."

"You don't reckon Sigismund Oswald," said Dr. Evans, wickedly, "and yet I believe he works beautifully. It is part of the Allam system to have him taught that accomplishment."

Margaret laughed, and Miss Kate relaxed into a grim smile, and a "Fye, Dr., how satirical you are. Oh, I had forgotten the O'Galls, three Miss O'Galls, and their mamma."

"But, sister Kate, you know they don't speak to the Allams—oh we can never ask them, and they are such good workers. How tiresome."

"True, I had forgotten that. You know they always blow their noses when they meet, and pretend not to see. That would never do."

"Not at all, Miss Kate," said the Dr., "They can't blow their noses all the evening long, and so they must

ultimately see one another. I think I see a capital opening for a reconciliation. Let me bring it about, I'll undertake to make, and to keep peace. What was their tiff about?"

"Why, nothing very great to be sure," said Miss Anne. "Mrs. Allam said that Miss Theresa O'Gall squinted, through the bad management of her mother, and that an Allam never squinted."

"If looking at things in one perpetual light, and using glasses to discover the faults of one's neighbours, could make one squint, I wonder how the Allams escaped it," remarked the Dr., who was not blind to the little peculiarities of that worthy family. "Nevertheless, pray invite them. I have composed worse quarrels than that, before now."

So, with some doubt and dread, the O'Galls were put down upon the invitation list, which they closed; still the males would have consisted only of Leonard and the redoubtable Sigismund, had not Arthur Trevennen happened to call that morning, and directly he heard of it, begged to be invited, adding, that his mother was away for a few days and he was "moped to death" alone. So invitations were sent out for the third day from that time, and from the moment of their acceptance, peace fled from the cottage of Northmoor. Wild confusion reigned, and one would have thought that the whole village was to be entertained and banquetted, instead of some fourteen persons coming to tea. For two days the sisters wandered about, clad in their most ancient garments, which were protected by a series of pinafores and dusters, tied on so as to make them look like mummies.

Miss Kate was mostly in the kitchen, where she continually invoked the cook to "take a handful" of various ingredients, and at an early point of the preparations, Margaret fell into disgrace by reading out a receipt wrongly, substituting pounds for ounces, whence came confusion. She was ignominiously expelled, and pronounced a "noody," which was the more dreadful, because vague and undefined. Thus repulsed, she fled to Miss Anne, who was in a state of distress because only fifteen pots of jam were forthcoming, nor was she comforted by Margaret's assertion, that no one ever did eat a whole pot, for she only answered

doubtfully, "they might this time ;" at last, however, she came to the conclusion that it was improbable. Nor was this all, for a succession of direful calamities ensued in rapid succession, which threatened to embitter the very idea of the Bee. The delinquent, though favourite, cat was found to have not simply drank, but made a bath of a pan of cream which had been specially needed, on hearing which horrible misdemeanour of Tibb, Miss Anne became so faint as to suddenly sit down upon a tray of custard cups—happily empty—which she did not improve. Then the housemaid must needs scald her hand, for which she was denominated "an idle minx" by Miss Kate, though this was unjust, seeing that the accident had happened from excess of activity. However, at length things took a turn for the better; the ever memorable day arrived, and with it, first of all, a message from the rectory to state that the Right Honourable Edgar Villiers, Dr. Evan's cousin, who had once been in the Cabinet, had come down from town overnight, and hoped to be allowed to pay his respects to the Misses Philipson, whose acceptance he begged for a basket of magnificent grapes and peaches fresh from the hot-houses of Beauvise. It was a great and almost overwhelming honour. Here was a courtier "accustomed," as Miss Anne remarked, "to sit with Emperors, Kings, and Princes, in the Cabinet, whom King George used to shake hands with, and tell all his secrets to, coming to take tea in their humble cottage. What is to be done my dear Kate?" she would say—"how to receive him I don't know. What must I call him, my Lord, Most Honourable, or Mr. Privy Councillor? Dr. Evans always calls the Archdeacon, Mr. Archdeacon. But a Royal Councillor! Will he walk backwards, do you think, when he comes? You know he is accustomed to do it, and perhaps he may now. Well, I only hope he won't expect me to do the same. I couldn't, you know, for I should certainly tread on his toes, and then, perhaps, get my head cut off. And then his sword, too, for I know they all wear little swords at court. I do so hope he won't draw it or do anything dreadful. Oh dear, I really almost wish he was not coming."

"Nonsense, my dear," said Miss Kate, reprovingly, "you may trust to me for all the etiquette. When I was in London—oh, nearly thirty-five years ago—at Alderman Grubb's, I saw him go to court, and know exactly what to do."

She was brave and unalarmed. Shall I confess it? and will it be believed, that this ancient spinster began to think, that, perhaps, the courtly bachelor was *the* destined man. She looked at herself in the glass, fondly stroked her high-roofed nose which "showed blood," and actually tried the effect of a small patch of sticking plaster, which she had seen used in old engravings of court beauties, while I am ashamed to say how long a time she spent in practising graceful attitudes and steps, letting down her gown behind, so as to resemble a train. On the whole she decided that she had quite the air of the Court of St. James's. Her manner inspired such confidence and resolution into her gentle sister, as to make her gradually forget the possible requirement of walking backward, or courtesying to the ground, and fixed her mind only upon the delights and honours of entertaining his Majesty's Privy Councillor. Oh, if Edward could but have been present! all would then have been safe; he could have talked of his friend the English Ambassador at Paris, and would doubtless have deeply impressed the old courtier with the idea that the Philipsons were somebodies, and accustomed to the best societies. However, he should hear of it; indeed Miss Anne would, I think, have sent an account to the papers, only that she was not sure whether Bee was spelt Bea or Bee. All was ready, and the ladies retired to the duties of the toilette, in which Margaret good-naturedly offered to assist them successively. Miss Kate was in great doubt between a puce-coloured satin or a shot green silk of choleraic hue. It was decided ultimately, however, in the favour of the former. Margaret was secretly wondering what piece of head gear might be destined as an accompaniment to this, when to her surprise, Miss Kate advanced from a closet, bearing something which must be regarded as a triumph of art. It was an erection, nay, I will be more particular, a cupola or dome

of net and lace, banded like the dome of Brunelleschi, though not with iron, but ribbons of puce, red, and green. Bows hovered about or perched upon it like tropical birds, while three small brooches in front gave it a classic and imposing aspect—one was a cameo, another a mosaic, and the third a pebble or coagulated gruel. To tell the truth, the good lady had made a special visit to Marbury to secure this marvellous production, and she valued it accordingly; for when her niece inquired whence the cap might come, she was answered, "*Toque*, my dear, not cap. These *toques* were worn, generally by fashionables, at the time that the Right Honourable gentleman was about court, and so I considered it a fitting compliment to recall those happy days to his mind by a head-dress of the period." To this nothing could be said, and so Margaret left her in happy self-contemplation to assist Miss Anne. She, good lady, had invested herself in a grave, lead-coloured silk, which well became her fair complexion, over this fell a cloudy collar of rich lace, a cap—a real cap, I mean—was on her head, and a shower of brooches decorated her person. They were of all kinds and in all positions—one brilliant gem like a jewelled shoe buckle perched in front of her cap, another was fastened in an unnatural manner to the velvet band which encircled her fair brows, another clasped the cap strings, a fourth confined her lace collar, while a fifth glittered at her waist; this last, resembling a cod fish's eye, was mysteriously reported to be intended for the fictitious luminary of one of her many former adorers. Miss Anne, it is true, shook her head when it was mentioned or admired, and a dewy moisture was observable in her blue eyes. With such a toilette as this, what could be desired? The spinster softly thanked her niece and said, "My dear, I feel, I don't know how, and scarcely know whether I am on my head or my heels. I seem as if I were about to be presented at Court, or led to the altar of Hymen;" then, having doubts as to the propriety of the latter part of her speech, she blushed, and departed to give the finishing touch to her arrangements. Margaret's costume was far less gorgeous than those of her aunts. She wore a bright blue silk dress with a muslin jacket which

suited her well, and showed off to advantage her soft complexion and golden hair. She was rather flushed with expectation and pleasure when she came down to join her aunts, and really looked very pretty. The three made a tour of inspection to see that all was properly prepared. The weather was so propitious as to allow them to have tea out upon the lawn under a fine old mulberry tree, and here due preparations had been made. The dining-room, as being the largest, was appropriated as the room of industry. In the centre, upon a huge round table, was placed the counterpane, consisting of a dozen strips of elaborate knitting all as white as snow. The resources of nearly all the work-boxes in the house had been taxed for contributions of scissors, needles, and thread, which were grouped at small distances apart, in number corresponding to the thirteen chairs surrounding the table. Two arm chairs near the window were evidently intended for the two elderly gentlemen, who had begged to be allowed to come early; and near them, in case they should feel dull or embarrassed with so large a preponderance of females, stood a little round table, on which were placed, in a tempting manner, boards for chess, and draughts, and backgammon, with all the necessary etcetera. Various vases of flowers about the room gave the finishing touch to the preparations, and made the place look, as Miss Kate said, "splendid." That good lady had all along been in a state of alarm and fidget, lest her great visitor might arrive first before any of the others, and so they should miss the introduction scene of which she was desirous. Judge then what was her delight when Mrs. and the Misses O'Galls were announced and entered the room in stiff and bristling muslins, bright with coloured ribbons. It was evident that they were in good case that afternoon—nothing could exceed the affability of their demeanour, or the congratulations to Miss Anne, the heroine of the evening, upon the completion of her stupendous work. Miss Kate began to hope that the Bee would prove a complete success. But then—a fearful thought! If the Allams arrive before Dr. Evans, the peace-maker! What was to be done? and she had privately decided that if such a horrible catastrophe were to occur, she should quietly go

to bed and leave the belligerents to fight their battles out alone, when, oh, blessed sight, the churchman and statesman appeared, and were formally announced by Mary. It was rather a disappointment to find in the Right Honourable Edgar Villiers, no gold laced, sworded, and periwigged courtier, but simply a rather fat, portly country gentleman, of a good-humoured, laughing countenance, and with an air quite destitute of mystery or secret intrigue. But nevertheless there was no lack of court grace in his elegant bow and profound reverence, while the manner in which he tapped his box, took snuff, and then bowed again to each lady successively, went straight to Miss Kate's heart and made her think the fatal hour was come. And then, too, his start on being informed that Margaret was her niece, and exclamation of, "Sister, surely you mean, my dear Dr.—she is quite a Philipson—just the very outline and classic nose," was the more remarkable, as he had never seen a Philipson before. Yes, truly he was a courtier—there was no mistake. Next came the Misses Twigg, amiable, though prim and thoroughly prepared for the serious business of the evening. They were somewhat cowed by the presence of the great man, and retired into a secluded corner, whence they watched his every motion with intense curiosity, waiting to hear some startling revelations of royalty which they might in turn relate in their own little social gatherings as from "a friend at court." They were disappointed, however; for on Miss Anne inquiring, in a sympathizing and agreeable manner, after the Queen and the royal family, and asking whether he often dined at Windsor, Mr. Villiers, too good-natured to grieve or hoax the worthy ladies, at once replied that he was very seldom there, as he spent much of his time upon his own estate—a confession which, I fear, rather depreciated his value for some while. The next arrivals were those of Mrs. and Miss Allam, together with Mrs. Aston and Sybil. Leonard, it seemed, had been suddenly called to town upon some business of importance, a piece of intelligence which Margaret, with the ingenious art of self-tormenting, common to those in her state, interpreted into a desire to avoid her. There was a

grim "prepared for action" look about Mrs. Allam on recognising the O'Galls, which made Miss Kate prepared for the production of pocket-handkerchiefs to any extent. What was her delight then, when Dr. Evans at once took the opportunity to begin his speech and interpose himself as peace-maker.

"As you have kindly allowed me, Miss Kate, to act as *magister ceremoniaris*, or master of the ceremonies—not lord of misrule, as some persons falsely translate it, I shall at once enter upon my office. I am sure all my mutual friends present"—with a little accent upon "mutual"—"must join with me in my sincere and hearty congratulations to Miss Anne upon the happy termination of her great industrial labour, and will unite in wishing that, whatever may be the destination of this quilt, the dreams of those who enjoy its warm folds may be as peaceful as, I am sure, were the waking thoughts of its fair and diligent artist." (A gentle murmur of applause greets this subtle compliment). "I must not occupy your valuable time longer, and will only add one word which the occasion suggests. This our social and industrial meeting is called, I understand, a Bee. Now, no one more fully appreciates those little insects than myself, as I have been a close observer of their habits for many years. Let me say, then, that as I know there are no drones, except Villiers and myself, or wasps among the company, so let me hope that the only sharp stings needed will be in the form of these bright scissors here, and that nothing but the sweetest, finest honey will be the product of this evening's employment." Much applause, in the midst of which the Dr. proceeds to arrange the guests after a fashion of his own, as follows:—Miss Kate at the head (if a round table can have a head), and Miss Anne at the bottom; then, in due order, Mrs. Allam, Mrs. O'Gall, Margaret, Miss Allam, Miss O'Gall, No. 1, and Miss Emma Twigg on one side; and Miss O'Gall, No. 2, Sybil, Miss Twigg, Mrs. Aston, and Miss O'Gall, No. 3, on the other. He handed each lady to her seat with some delicate compliment or remark, and by this bold manoeuvre brought the enemies into close contact. Had he then departed, all

would have been lost in spite of his politic speech; but he was far too wise to do so. On the contrary, he and Villiers walked round the table nearly all the time, dividing their attentions equally, and starting only such conversation as could be joined in by all. In time, this told, and as the fly Dr. had managed to abstract no less than three pairs of scissors, there arose a constant necessity for borrowing from neighbours, so that gradually the enemies found themselves sharing not only the same place and conversation, but even scissors. Frigidity could not long continue under such favouring circumstances, and soon complete harmony was the order of the evening. Sybil was the object of general attention. Certainly she looked magnificent in her sweeping black brocaded robe, and with one single scarlet gladiolus in her rich dark hair by way of contrast. Then, too, her very affable and agreeable manners and lively conversation—for she was in high spirits—made her a great favourite. She went to work with her usual energy and heartiness, but found time to keep up a laughing skirmish with Dr. Evans, with whom she appeared delighted. Margaret both felt and looked rather out of spirits. As I have said, she thought that Leonard evidently wished to avoid her, and the idea gave her much distress, as very different from her expectations after their having been thrown so much together, and his late tenderness to her. She had, too, an inexpressible feeling of something unpleasant about to befall her which did not tend to raise her spirits. But Miss Priscilla and Miss O'Gall did not leave her much opportunity for bitter reflections, keeping up a continual stream of questions and remarks which fully occupied her. It was two hours good work to get through their labours, and by six o'clock the counterpane was pronounced complete, and Miss Anne blushing received the congratulations of her friends, and began to feel it the proudest moment of her life. A general move was then made for the garden, where the party was reinforced by Sigismund Oswald Allam and Arthur Trevennen, who had just arrived. Need I say how bountifully the board was supplied, or how the Beauvisé contribution occupied the most

conspicuous place? Never had Miss Philipson felt so intensely happy, as when she was led by the old courtier to the head of the table, which, he gallantly observed, he had never seen more charmingly occupied, murmuring some verse about "youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm," which, to say the least, was scarcely appropriate; but he was apt to quote somewhat at random. Of course, Miss Anne's health was drunk with applause, and the gentle lady had to utter a few confused words of scarcely audible thanks. Of course, Miss Philipson was toasted as their fair hostess, to which she—less nervous—responded in a speech worthy of Minerva. Every one was delighted and amiable—such a Bee was never known before. Arthur Trevennen was in particularly high spirits, and very attentive to Margaret, almost too much so, indeed, to please that young lady, who was not much inclined for it, and in vain tried to escape from his politeness. She fancied that Sybil watched them curiously; here she was wrong—she also was persuaded that Mrs. Allam watched them grimly, and here she was right. That good lady looked on with high disapprobation, and in vain tried to supplant Arthur by Sigismund, who, for once, was obstinate. The statesman walked about observing all and chatting with all; and though it seemed that the Queen did *not* confide all her secrets in his ear, nor was he in the habit of wearing an ermine robe and sword, yet for all that, he was allowed to be a very charming man. To Mrs. Allam he suggested that Sigismund showed a decided turn for diplomacy, judging, I suppose, from that gentleman's remarkable taciturnity, and expressed his regret when the fond mother answered, "No, my dear sir, my views for Sigy are otherwise. For three generations there has *always* been a Sigismund Allam in the church, and I will not be the one to violate this rule. Great praise is due to Sigy for the ready consent he gives to my wishes, and I, for one, think him highly to be commended." The courtier gently murmured that "from such a mother what might not be expected," and then turned to Sybil, with whom he had made great progress. He promised to come and visit her at Brancepeth—said he had heard wonders of her, and

was most desirous to see her nineteenth century adaptation of the patriarchal system. She laughed and replied—

“That means you don’t believe in what you hear. I know you men give us credit for nothing higher than the colour of a ribbon.”

“Far from it, I assure you, my dear Miss Clare. I am disposed to give women credit for all the good which exists—in theory,” added he softly, with a wicked smile.

“And I,” saluted Sybil, “give men credit for all the evil which exists—in practice.”

“I cry mercy, for no man ever yet overcame a woman in argument. Nature did not intend it. So pardon me, and consider yourself victorious.”

“No, I shall not be satisfied with so easy and hollow a victory. You and your charming cousin, Dr. Evans, with whom I am immensely taken, had better come and visit me in my northern lair. I will be hospitable, and we can fight our battles over again.”

“She is a fine creature,” murmured the old batchelor, as he turned away, “and I wish for my own sake I was a little younger,” a speech he generally uttered some six times a-day.

The evening passed away rapidly, for all were amused, and all, save Margaret, perhaps, enjoyed themselves. She had a firm conviction that Arthur meant to say what she did not wish to hear, and kept at a distance as much as she could. Sybil was very warm and affectionate, and she thought how, under other circumstances, she should have enjoyed her conversation; as it was, however, she had to devote herself to the Misses O’Gall, and the two Misses Twigg, with whom it was difficult to get on. However, the guests soon began to depart, one and all expressing thanks for the delightful evening they had spent. The courtier openly said that “the gilded halls of kings, contained not so many delights as the cottage of Northmoor”—a speech which set Miss Kate’s heart in a flutter of nervous expectation, while Dr. Evans remarked “that the evening’s honey had proved untinctured with gall.” Altogether the Bee was a great success, and so the maiden sisters felt it.

CHAPTER XV.

A VIRTUOSO LAWYER.

"POURED the rain, howled the wind, groaned the trees, hoarsely shrieked the owl!" Thus, my dear reader, if I were writing a Radcliffian or Murder and Mystery Romance, might I have commenced this chapter, and I think you would have been prepared to learn after this little preamble, that "a solitary traveller, of elderly appearance, might have been seen making his way along a gloomy road, under the storm of the elements above mentioned." But as I am *not* writing a romance, perhaps it will be as easy to say at once, that it was a sloppy wet night as Mr. Wildman, the lawyer, was returning from his office to his house. Oh, dear, what a very decidedly wet night it is! There is no mistaking the steady straight fall of the rain which has continued for twenty-four hours, and looks as if it meant to do so for twenty-four more. It splashes on the pavement, it circles in the gutter, it runs down in cellars and areas, and makes every one feel cross and discontented. Mr. Wildman does, at all events; though I am sorry to say that is no unusual thing with him, wet or dry. But he feels particularly so to-night, for three reasons, firstly, because he had upset the ink over a deed, which, as he kept no clerk, he would have to copy again; secondly, because he had seen a fish in rare old Palissy ware, which he longed to buy and could not afford; lastly, because it was very wet and dismal, and he had a long way to walk home. All these things combined to make him feel unhappy and out of sorts, and so he stamped along the streets of Birmingham, and hustled every one he met, resolutely taking the wall and thrusting all comers into the gutter. While he walks home, let us inquire into his history. He was the only son of a respectable grocer and his wife, who had set their hearts on their boy being that undefinable thing, a gentleman, and dedicated all their hard earned savings to

this purpose. Accordingly, John Wildman was in time articled to a respectable lawyer, where he went through all the drudgery of the office, and having ultimately been made head clerk, on the death of his master bought up the whole concern. It fell off in course of time considerably, for Wildman's manners were not agreeable, and people did not much care to come to him. So, at the point where you are now introduced to him, you behold him able to dispense with a clerk and manage with only a miserable little errand boy, the burden of whose life he was. His character was a very singular one. Without the slightest love, respect, or admiration for any mortal living or dead—without the least interest in the daily course of events, domestic or foreign, which make or mar empires. He cared as little for his fellow-men and their concerns, as if he belonged to a different order of beings. After his business, his whole mind and energies were given to the collection of old furniture, china, and such articles of beauty or curiosity. A strange taste for this strange, hard man, certainly; and yet one easily accounted for. Despising fiction, poetry, and, indeed, all modern literature, he had, when quite a boy, given himself up to the bright pages of Froissart, Monstrelet, de Commynes, and Montfaucon, and would pore over these, hour after hour, with an intense, deep enjoyment that it was curious to see. In spite of his harsh, abrupt manners, he had rather a cultivated mind, and was fully alive to the beautiful in art—real nature he did not so much care about. It was not surprising then, that he should have such a weakness for objects of the antique, and devote so much of his time and money to the purchase and acquirement of carved oak, tankards, Venice glasses, and old china. In hunting up and obtaining these he was untiring. No trouble or difficulty too great to be undertaken and gone through, so that he could call himself master of some rare old product of the potter's wheel, and by these tastes his clients were benefited, as he would continually ask for and take in the place of his fee, some article to them of little value, but to him of priceless worth. Such was John Wildman, who was returning to his house this wet, dismal evening in September, and is now standing at the door, fumbling away

with his latch-key which is obstinate. It opens at last, and admits him to a gloomy little passage, on one side of which is the room where he generally sits, and into this, after having hung up his dripping coat and umbrella, he enters. It is small but cheerful, with a bright blazing fire in the grate, which flickers and casts pleasant lights upon the dull red curtains and somewhat dingy horse-hair furniture. One small table by the fire is reclaimed from the confusion which reigns supreme in every other part of the room. Upon it are a few books and papers, which alone testify to the occupation and calling of the master of the house, consisting chiefly of Coke and Chitty, and such ponderous legal treatises. But the other tables, the chairs, shelves, book-cases, and, indeed, every "coigne of vantage" imaginable, are heaped, loaded, piled with vases, weapons, reliquaries, tankards, chains, and other such trifles. In one corner is a huge Dresden china dragon, of glorious ugliness; near him is a St. Peter, carved in wood, while at a little distance is a Japanese Joss, lolling its tongue. Huge vases, cups, saucers, of the rarest Nankin, and other wares are placed together in rich confusion, while half-a-dozen carved oak cabinets and coffers form a fine dark background for the lighter and more elegant articles. Mr. Wildman gazes fondly as he enters upon all this *mélée*, and stops to admire and fondle his favourite monster, for, like Lady Francis in Pelham, he has several; but in a few minutes he is seated in his easy chair near the fire, with a large book propped open before him, and in the full enjoyment of his tea. He has been employed in this manner for some half hour or so, and is meditating having the tea-things removed, when a loud and long rap at the outer door awakens him from his reveries, and makes him apprehensive of a visitor. He hears with disgust the door answered by the old woman who is his factotum, and a hurried colloquy, in which he distinguishes such words as "must see him," "matter of importance—won't be denied." At last the door opens, and through a misty cloud of steaming wrappers and great-coats, he recognizes the son of one of his best clients—old farmer Orchard, who had already made seven wills and paid him handsomely for them.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," is the greeting; "but I'm afraid I must trouble you to go with me if convenient. Father is took main bad, and can't hold it long, they say."

"Well, but surely he doesn't want another will now?"

"Lord blefs 'e, no sir. Couldn't make one if he did. He's complete unsensible, and takes no notice at all. But I know as there is always confusion like after a death, and so I thought as how if you were there you could make things straight a bit. So I thought, m'appen, you would like to go."

"Aye, aye, my good Mr. Orchard, I dare say you are right. Does it rain now?"

"Just about," was the reply, accompanied by a Newfoundland dog-like shake of the coats and wrappers which protected the young farmer. "But I've got my gig just round here, and we'll be at the big farm in no time."

"Very well," responds the lawyer with a deep sigh, mentally resolving to expend the proceeds of this night's excursion in the purchase of *the* Palissy ware fish, on which his heart was so deeply set. In a few minutes, slippers are exchanged for boots, great-coat donned, and the book, "Froissart," regretfully laid aside; a few minutes more, and farmer and lawyer are tearing along the muddy dismal road which leads to the "big farm." As they approach, the door opens, and a bright gush of fire-light beams out into the paved yard. Above, at an upper window, is seen that melancholy glimmer of a shaded light, which speaks so surely of sickness and death—of the latter in this instance, for the old housekeeper who comes to the door, greets them with "He's gone, poor soul." The lawyer utters one of these useful platitudes about mortality which offend no one, and are equally appropriate at a birth, a marriage, or a death; while the young farmer descends from his place, with a simple exclamation of "poor old man—he was the right sort of a farmer, and always beat everybody with his early crops: he was just about a good one at that." They entered the house together, and while waiting by the blazing fire for something, as the young man said, "to drive out the cold," listened to a long account from the garrulous housekeeper of exactly how he was "took for death, and what a beautiful corpse he did make!" "Sir," said she, "it was

only last Friday—this day week, I do declare—as he said to me, ‘Missus,’ said he, ‘you never gives us now a bit of boiled beef, and I’m a’most tired with all this mutton and veal.’ ‘La, Mr. Orchard,’ says I, ‘don’t ‘e say so—for why should ‘e have whatever haft a mind to! But you do know as the doctor said beef wafn’t so good for you.’ ‘Bother the doctor,’ says he, ‘don’t I take his physick stuff by the gallon’ (and so he did, and I can show you every blessed bottle that he ever took, I can), ‘don’t I take all that mefs, and what’s the good if I can’t eat what I’ve a mind to?’ ‘And so ‘e shall,’ I said; and so on Sunday—that’s last Sunday, you know, sir—I got as fine a piece of boiling beef as ever you see, so fat and juicy, it was a reg’lar picture, and I biled it with a mefs of greens and veg’a’bles, carrots, and such like, but no parsnips—for them the dear departed couldn’t abide, and used to say he’d as lieve eat a toad—and it eat beautiful, it did. And he made as hearty a meal as ever I see man take, and then he went to church in the afternoon (for he was a very reg’lar man for that), and when he came back, he said, ‘Missus,’ said he, ‘I am so sleepy like, that I nodded all through the sermon, which I don’t like to do at all. I can’t think what’s come to me.’ So I said, ‘why don’t ‘e sit down in your easy-chair and take a nap,’ and he said ‘I will.’ But his sleep wafn’t easy and comfortable, and he kept awaking up and starting. Well, all of a sudden, he said to me, ‘Mrs. Fisher, how long have you lived here with me?’ and I was taken straight back like at this, and scarce knew what to say, but I stammered out, ‘La, Mr. Orchard, why, how you started me! Let me see: I have been here fifteen years—no, sixteen, I do declare, come Christmas. I know it was Christmas when I first came, because of the puddings—you said you had never tasted such.’ ‘As long as that?’ said he, all in a dream, ‘as long as that?’ Well, well, old woman, I haven’t been a bad master to ‘e, have I? If so, I know you’ll forgive me and not bear malice; I haven’t forgotten thy services, and so you’ll find.’ To hear him speak like this gave me such a turn as I never felt—no, not even when my own, poor, dear man was brought home on a shutter with three ribs and his back broken, to say nothing of his best clothes torn to ribbons by them nasty trains. I said, ‘La, Mr. Orchard, don’t ‘e talk so; it aint

natral like to hear 'e speak of such like things,' and I tried to laugh it out of him. But he only shook his head and seemed all nohow. Presently he said as he didn't feel well, and thought he would go to bed. So he did, and soon he got so much worse that I sent for the doctor. He was with him a long time, and when he came down he shook his head, and said it was a case, and that his liver was congested. Well, you know, Mr. Edward, how much worse he got that night, and though we gave all the doctor sent, it was no good at all—might as well have given him water. He lay in a kind of doze, half-awake and half-asleep, and didn't take no notice at all. So he's been till to-day, when, soon after you had gone for Birmingham, Mr. Edward, he started me, by all of a sudden beginning to talk as quiet and sensible as he ever did. He put out his hand to me, and said, 'I know I'm going, Mrs. Fisher? don't 'e cry, woman; why, what's there to be sorry for? I was getting a poor, dry stick, and it was time I should make way for the younger ones. You've been a good servant to me, and I haven't forgotten what thee hast done—so you'll find in my will. Now, you tell my boy Ned to be a good lad and a better man than his father; and tell him to be kind to all his little brothers and sisters, and mark 'e now, you tell him to make up our quarrel with Bolton's people, though the right of way *is* ours, for all that. But I don't care for rights of ways now, nor will he when he is like I am. And he's to tell Parson James I was sorry for what I said about the pews, and if I did anything contrary to him, he'll forgive it I know; and tell him, too, I've left a ten pound-note for anything he likes to do in the church, and he'll forget we ever had any words. Mind you tell Ned as my last words were, to tell him to be a good lad and read his bible, and not to use them nasty mowing machines—I can't abide them, skimping the odd corners; and I never use them, nor must he.' And then he grew all of a faint and said it was so dark—but, poor dear, the darkness was in his eyes, and he couldn't get out another word, but was just raised up and died like a lamb in my arm, poor, dear soul," said the good housekeeper, bursting into tears. "I never had a better master, nor shall again. He took his meals like a Christian, and never took delight in finding

fault and picking holes, as a many will. No, he was a just about good kind of man." The son had not listened without sundry gulps and application of his pocket-handkerchief, and now broke in, "Aye, he was a good farmer of the real old sort, and a good father to me. We never had an angry word, that I can remember; and if any man says he wasn't a good sort of a fellow and an honest man, who owed no one a penny, I'll fight him to-morrow," and he dashed his fist on the table with energy. As Mr. Wildman did not seem ready to accept this challenge, he proposed that they should go up stairs and see the corpse. The women had done their work, and there, on the bed, lay the late farmer Orchard, with a quiet, happy look on the upturned countenance refined by death, which spoke of a peaceful end. The son, approaching, smoothed the grizzled dark hair upon the furrowed brow, and took the hand in his, then turning to the lawyer, he said, "You had better touch him, sir, if you don't mind—you won't dream of him then!" and Mr. Wildman, with a slight inward dread, went through the prescribed formula. He then at once turned to business, and suggested a search for the will, which was ultimately found in an old box under the bed with samples of seed and grain, old keys, and other such trifles. It was delivered into the lawyer's keeping, who then proceeded to affix his seal to the various boxes and closets which stood in the room. In so doing his eye fell upon a quaint bureau, which at once attracted the fullest attention of his curiosity-loving mind. It was not very large, it is true, but real old Japan work—black, adorned with plentiful gilding and inlaid mother-of-pearl. What a bureau! and how well it would suit a certain vacant corner of his room. He felt that to obtain this, he would undergo almost any amount of trouble or difficulty, and resolved to procure it by hook or crook, though not a word did he say at the time. Things went on as they usually do in such places. The heir's whole mind was entirely occupied with the cares and business of the grand funeral he was resolved his father should have, and the fact of his having to fetch his younger brother and sister from their Yorkshire school, naturally took up much of his time. So Mr. Wildman, who was expressly desired to stay until after the funeral,

was left much to the care of Mrs. Fisher, and had to listen to almost interminable stories of the "dear departed," and a great many other dears departed, whom that good lady had known, while his mind was all the time exploring the mysteries of the bureau up stairs, ranging its recesses, and peering into its secret drawers and pigeon-holes. At last, however, the funeral was over. Guests had come from all parts, and had been feasted and entertained as if for a wedding, rather than the present mournful occasion. Cake and wine before; hams, tongues, roast beef and puddings afterwards, had all been duly demolished, and the bearers had had their dinner in the kitchen. The will had been read, and as there were few to satisfy, those few got their rights, and all the rest had, what, perhaps, they enjoyed almost as much, their wrongs; and now Mr. Wildman was about to depart, when, taking the new heir aside, he boldly said, "My dear sir, will you tell me one thing? Do you set much value on the Japan bureau up stairs?"

"Value it? Lord bless 'e no. Not a bit," is the answer. "But why do you ask? Father got it at old Mercer's sale, and it has stood up there ever since."

"Should you object to part with it for a consideration?" asked the lawyer, his heart beginning to beat high.

"Aye, that I should," was the answer; "but I'll tell you what I'll do. If you do care for the ricketty old thing, you may have it and welcome, that you may."

"My dear sir," gasped the delighted lawyer, "you overwhelm me—you do, indeed. I'm eternally obliged, I do assure you." Then fearing lest the young man should suspect it of containing hidden treasures, he went on more coolly—"You know what a fancy I have for old curiosities of that kind, that are, perhaps, of no use to any one else. Really I am delighted with my present, and shall take the greatest care of it, I can tell you."

Thus without any more ado, it was decided that the bureau should be sent by the first cart that went to Birmingham; and so in a week's time, Mr. Wildman had the intense pleasure of superintending its unpacking, and fitting it into the hitherto unoccupied corner of his room, where we may safely leave both him and it for a while.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SURPRISE.

THE autumn, with all its fair, warm weather was gone. December had come, and brought with it frost and snow, and all the accompaniments of a severe winter, otherwise little change had taken place in Northmoor since the time of the ever memorable Bee. Sybil had paid her visit to Gaunt House, and was now returned to her northern "den," as she called it. In spite, or perhaps (if some be right), in consequence of the difference of their characters, she and Margaret had been excellent friends. Sybil's strong, fine, resolute mind, had not been without its due effect upon the softer disposition of Margaret Philipson, who, in her turn, had influenced Sybil "Cœur de lion," as she called her. The difference of age had certainly given Sybil the preponderance, and her pithy sayings and far-seeing conclusions had had the effect of communicating some of her energetic nature to Margaret. Our heroine was graver and more quiet than when last we saw her; not so buoyant or light-hearted, and rather inclined for solitary reverie, more so indeed, than is quite good for her, for she certainly looks paler and has not so much of the bright bloom of health as is desirable at eighteen. Why is all this? I fear the reason is too plain. Margaret had given way to the first burst of her natural feelings on discovering the depth of her affection for Leonard, and now was suffering from the re-action of her mind. His image had taken deep root in her heart, and her too faithful memory delighted to recall and dwell upon his words, his actions—nay, to fathom, as she believed, his thoughts. But then his late behaviour had been inexplicable, and as unlike his former

friendly intercourse as it was possible to suppose. He appeared overwhelmed in business, which continually took him away from Gaunt House. When she walked over, he was either out of the way, or if he met her, his manner, though very courteous and polite, had little of the old frankness with which he would in former times tell her of all his plans and schemes, asking her opinion, and often deferring to her judgment. And yet, with all this, there was a settled melancholy in all his movements, which betrayed the regret with which he regarded those old happy days. When he spoke of them, it was ever with pleasure—when he looked forward into the future, it was with doubt and dread. In this state of things Margaret naturally felt disposed to gradually discontinue her visits to Gaunt House, though the unchanged kindness of Mrs. Aston made this difficult. Still she felt, that for her own sake, she ought no longer to be there, and almost felt angry with herself when she found how great her love for the old farm house was. In vain she would chide with herself for her feelings towards Leonard, analyse them, try to forget them, to regard it as a mistake—it was no use. She felt, and when can it be otherwise than humbling to feel, that she loved one who now avoided her. In vain she tried to persuade herself that the emotions she suffered were simply those of gratitude to the favour of her life. Gratitude is not generally so painful an affair—never to generous natures. No, the fact must be looked in the face—must be grappled, and perhaps conquered. But this it was that made her prefer her own little room looking out upon the wintry sky and falling snow flakes which floated by the casement, where she could in solitude commune with herself and be still. It was not a very wholesome occupation, and conscious of this, she would make efforts to break her mind upon some employment which might serve to call it off from its sad thoughts in private. She taught in the village school, she sometimes visited some of the old people and tried to take an interest in their condition and plans for its amelioration. But, nevertheless, all in Northmoor remarked, as well as her aunts, that Miss Philipson did not look the thing—that she wanted change of air and

scene, for it was evident that she was far from well. One thing had certainly added to her occupation and amusement, namely, the necessity of paying several visits to Margrove, which, at this time was nearly finished. Her aunts, wisely mistrusting their own taste, had resource to her to settle such various points of decoration and ornament as the advanced state of the building rendered desirable. Of her father, little or nothing was known; he appeared still bound to France, which, indeed, he had never left save for a hurried scramble to do Switzerland. For the last six weeks, however, letters had ceased, and the aunts were completely in the dark as to dear Edward's movements. They were destined, however, to be surprised, and that not in a very agreeable manner. One morning the postman brought a thick letter, with the foreign post-mark, directed to Margaret, who, recognising her father's hand, with trembling eagerness broke the seal, her aunts looking on in equal astonishment and delight. It was the first letter that Margaret had ever received from her father, and she began to read it with intense avidity. In a moment, however, the blood first rushed to her cheeks, and then directly leaving her colourless as a lily, the letter fell from her hands, and she sat down almost fainting. With an effort, however, she recovered herself, and in a few minutes after, was able to read though in a somewhat trembling voice, the following epistle which had caused this emotion—

“MY DEAR DAUGHTER,—Although not in the general habit of correspondence with you—preferring to reserve for genial conversation such incidents and events as may occur to me on my travels—yet so important an act in my life has just been consummated, that I feel to withhold it from your immediate knowledge, would be unjustly to imply a doubt of the feelings with which you will receive it. It was, I am well assured, your dear mamma's sincere wish that I should endeavour to meet with and enjoy such bliss as her death might leave me in this world, and I know how much she wished that—when time had done his work in healing and pouring balm into my wounded heart—I should try to fill that place, from the adornment of which, death so prematurely

snatched her. But in this life, such women are not often to be found; and, as you know, I have passed eighteen years of solitary wretchedness in (what I deemed) the vain search after one who might, once more, both recall and replace my lost Kate. But this is no longer the case, my daughter, and in the Honourable Miss Edith Forbes, youngest daughter of the Viscount Edginton, I have found all that my heart could desire, as well as all, I am sure, your fondest wishes can imagine. In her are united, by a rare conjunction, the highest charms ordinarily belonging to both mental and bodily capacities, while her noble birth well fits her to cast additional lustre upon a time-honoured name, which Edward Philipson at least has never disgraced. You will not be surprised then, to hear that our nuptials took place last Thursday, though, for many reasons, they were of a very quiet nature. Afterwards we retired from the eye of the busy world to Orleans, and sought that secluded bliss which congenial spirits, under the influence of charming scenery, never fail to inspire. Prepare then, my dear daughter, to clasp to your heart one who will realise the fondest yearnings of your heart, and repay you the solitude which, for eighteen years, you as well as I must have felt. When I tell you that your dear mamma, equally with me, longs to embrace you, and unites in kindest love, you will recognise her kind and generous nature. In the mean time, to satisfy her eager longings, pray send us, to our address, the finest photograph you can possibly have taken—if we may not have the reality, at least we will cherish the fair shadow. We return to England in ten days or a fortnight, and I must trust to you to see everything prepared at Margrove as I could wish.” [Then followed a long list of directions, and the letter ended.] “Accept then, my dear daughter, the fondest expressions of love that a parent can devise, or a daughter hear, and, believe me to be, now as ever, your loving father,
“EDWARD PHILIPSON.”

To say that this wondrous piece of composition took away the breath of all present, would not be saying enough. After Margaret had finished reading it aloud, there was a dead

pause, and aunts and niece regarded each other for a time in astonished silence. Then they began as their tongues were unloosed.

"Did you ever hear of anything so extraordinary in your life, Kate?"

"No, Anne, never!"

"Ten days or a fortnight—Honourable Miss Forbes," murmured Margaret, scarcely yet recovered from her maze. "I don't understand it."

"Nor any one else, my dear," said Miss Kate. "It's extraordinary, most extraordinary; never to say a word beforehand—never to write a line!"

Margaret's eye glanced upon the enclosure directed to the Misses Philipson, which the letter contained, and quietly handed it to the eldest sister.

"Ah, perhaps this may explain this strange piece of work," said she, and sat down, using the privilege of birth-right, to peruse it, Anne all the while following her with eager eyes and working mouth. But if the former letter had cast an apple of discord among them, this latter one seemed to contain a very orchard of such fruit. Darker and darker grew Miss Kate's brow, and more gloomy and resolved her countenance, while sundry strange exclamations of "Marry come up," "bless my heart," and "heart alive," like lightning flashes showed the troubled state of the atmosphere. A request to be informed "whether she were on her head or her heels," concluded the perusal; and with a stony, yet amazed look, Kate arose and led her sister away, saying, "Strange doings these, hoity toity, indeed! Well, come here sister Anne and read this, and bless your stars that you have a sister to look to."

So the pair left the room, and Margaret, who, from the surprise her own particular letter caused her, was not so fully alive to the mysteries of her aunts' epistle, gave herself up to a strange reverie of mingled feelings. She did not feel the slightest pang of jealousy or anger at hearing of the new mother-in-law, for she had never known either a mother's or a father's love, and therefore could not be deprived of that she never had. Still, if her new mamma were all that

her father said—and the sickening sentimentality which she could not disguise from herself rather inclined to doubt it—it would be a gain to have some one to whom to confide her joys and sorrows. But all was too vague and indistinct for her to come to any decided feeling of joy or sorrow—she could only hope. One thing was evident, she was about to depart from Northmoor and Gaunt House, an idea which she could not entertain without regret and sorrow. She felt that thenceforth her intercourse with those places, where she had been so happy, was over—a new life beginning, which she much feared would not be so peaceful as the last seven months had been. It is not to be wondered then, if she was shedding some few natural tears when she was aroused by the return of her aunts. There was a solemnity and gravity about them, betokening a crisis near at hand. “My dear niece,” began aunt Kate, “I have a very painful and disagreeable duty to fulfil, and one equally unexpected and undesired. I am—we both, fortunately, are able to distinguish between the innocent and guilty parties, and therefore in what I am about to say, you must not think that our feelings towards you are in the least altered—quite the contrary. With how much affection we have always regarded your father, you know well: all our pride and our hopes were in him—perhaps too much so. Well, he has now chosen to wound our feelings in the most extraordinary and cruel manner, and in this letter he throws out unmistakable hints that his marriage has made a difference in our positions, and that, for the future, the intercourse (always very slight) between this house and Margrove, had better be discontinued. The petty meanness contained in this,” said the good lady, “I despise and pity, and consider it as a proof that deterioration and not elevation of mind has followed his high connection. I thank goodness I am not ashamed of my birth and origin, and I must say that I think a cottage which, however humble, has entertained one of his Majesty’s Privy Councillors, might very well have received Edward Philipson and the younger daughter of Viscount Edginton. However, all this is past. I have thought it better to tell you this, my dear, that I might assure you that our affection for you so far from being diminished,

is rather, if possible, increased. It may be your lot," added aunt Kate, growing melodramatic, "it may be your lot to dwell in the gilded halls of Margrove, but should the hour of misfortune ever come upon you, then remember that the little cottage of Northmoor is ever open to you as a sure and faithful refuge. Have I expressed your sentiments, Anne?"

"Yes, Kate. But, oh, I shall never cease to wonder how Edward could be so cruel!" and "she lifted up her voice and wept."

Margaret in vain tried to comfort her aunts, assuring them how much she was grieved at what she heard, how grateful for all their kindness she felt, and how very, very much she loved them. The three all cried together in sympathy, until at last Kate's wonted spirit returned. She forbade the subject, and at once turned her mind to Margaret's approaching departure, which was to take place in a few days. So ended this mournful scene.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEPARTURE.

It was all over. Margaret had bid good-bye to her aunts, and paid her melancholy round of farewell visits. There was not a place she could leave without regret, even the Allams lost half their unpleasantness in her eyes as connected with Northmoor. She had been for the last time to Gaunt House, and it was in parting with Mrs. Aston that her resolution really failed her and she burst into hysterical tears. The treatment of her aunts had opened her eyes more fully to the utter meanness of her father's character, and she saw that his new career was to be founded upon the sacrifice of all his former friends and acquaintances. She felt, no doubt but that this visit was the last she would ever be allowed to pay to the farm, and all the happy hours she had spent there came rushing back upon her with ten-fold force. Leonard was very much distressed and moved, and his farewell words had none of that embarrassment and reserve which had characterised him of late. He wrung Margaret's hand with a nervous energy, and after a few words, as if he dared not trust himself to say all then was in his heart, turned away abruptly. But now Margaret was really gone, and established at Margrove, where she was overwhelmed with the duties of arranging, directing, and ordering all the multifarious little details which are always left to the last moment. Her days were spent in a series of audiences or levees, with painters, decorators, carpenters, and glaziers, and her nights in calling to mind all the things she had omitted to do in the day, and wondering what would be the consequences.

It was a sharp, cold December night—an old fashioned December, I mean, when frost and snow were not so much a matter of surprise as they are now—and the glistening white snow lay thick on the ground, and was still drifting down, and softly falling against the windows of Gaunt House Farm. Mrs. Aston heard it, but did not see it, as she sat at work in the parlor or general room, for the red curtains were drawn across the window seats and were glowing with the reflection of the blazing fire. Her little Devonshire chair was moved close up to the hearth, on one side of which stood her work-table heaped up with piles of orange, and blue, and green wools, which with rapid click of her knitting needles she was converting into comforters and muffatees for some of her class at the Sunday school. A tabby cat, old and generally demure as it is, does not seem ashamed to give sly taps to the dangling ball each time it comes near its place on the hearth-rug, but is too lazy to enter deeply into the game. On the other side of the fire-place, an old fashioned arm chair, and a table heaped with books and writing materials, points out Leonard's usual place, though they are now deserted, for it is the time when he is engaged at his night school, which is held regularly in a back kitchen. At last a shuffling of feet is heard, denoting that work is over for the night, and in a minute after the door opens and Leonard appears.

"You look tired of waiting, mother," says he to Mrs. Aston, as he enters.

"And I am sure, my dear, you do of working. There now, shut up those wearisome books and sit down in peace. Your brain is on the rack all day long. Always at work. There take your slippers and rest if you possibly can."

"Did you see after Halliday's bad arm, mother? I told him to come up."

"Yes, I gave him the linen I had put out."

"And Emma Day—did she come for the books?"

"Yes, yes child. All has gone on perfectly well, and as it should. All have come up who should—all have had what they wanted—and I suppose all are satisfied. And now, child, tell me do you ever think of yourself?"

"Yes, mother," and there is a quiet grave smile, "a great deal more than is at all good for me."

"Then it must be in your sleep, my dear, for all day long you are occupied with the business of others. Consider yourself, my child."

"I tell you that I do so already, too much ; I shall grow selfish."

"How absurd. And these thoughts of yours ?"

"Are what circumstances make them—often sad."

"Yes ; and you brood over them quietly, all to yourself. Leonard, you are growing iron. I am almost afraid of you."

"What iron weapon am I then, mother, that you fear me—a ploughshare, a reaping hook, or a sword."

"You are not the first, my son, for your mind is already ploughed up ; nor the second, for your harvest time is not yet come. Leonard, you are a sword, and a sharp one, too, which is wearing out its scabbard."

"You speak in mysteries and enigmas, mother."

"True, my son, and I leave their interpretation to you. Do you know, to-night I have been looking in that bright flame there, and I saw a vision."

"Tell it me."

"I will, then, if you will faithfully apply it. I looked until strange forms were visible, and this was what I saw. A tall, bright, glowing tower, which raised itself aloft mightily, and lifted up its head in conscious power ; and I admired it, and thought how strong it was, and how deep its foundations. Well, a small, but intensely hot coal, all of a fiery heat, fell upon this tower, and had a wondrous influence upon it. It did not blaze and fall to ashes ; no, but I could see within, and I knew that, though it looked just as strong and firm as before, yet really the heart of it was all consumed, and it was ready to crumble to dust at the slightest touch."

"And what was the end, mother ?"

"Just then you came in, and I looked from the shadow to the substance, and from the type to the reality. Leonard, how long am I to speak in enigmas ?"

"Mother, you need never speak otherwise than plainly to

me, nor will I use other language towards you. We do, or ought to, understand each other; and I believe that the time has come when we may treat openly on the only subject in which there has been, I think, any reserve. Say on, my mother."

"All I ask is, why, then, has been this reserve? What need for it, when you must have felt assured of my sympathies?"

"If I have seemed of late to withdraw somewhat from your sympathy, it has not, believe me, been because I at all doubted or mistrusted them; but rather because I felt the time was not yet come when they would be of service to me. Now I come to you both for sympathy and counsel."

"Leonard, tell me one thing. You love Margaret Philipson—do you not?"

"Aye, mother, I do love her with all my heart. That it is over which I have brooded for these months past. You know I am not impulsive naturally. The first time I ever saw her, she made a deep impression on a heart not usually impressible. I waited and deliberated with myself. I waited and watched her—I saw her here, elsewhere, continually. By long conversations, I drew out her whole mind—its treasures, they are many, and its faults—for she is but human. Gradually, and by slow, though sure degrees, I found her image becoming fixed in my heart, and I knew perfectly well what were the nature of my feelings towards her. I tried whether occasional absences would have any effect. They did not. I thought of and loved her the more. Circumstances threw us more and more together. The accident, in which I both endangered and afterwards saved her life, could not do otherwise than bind us closely, and it was only soon afterwards when I found how deeply a report that Trevennen was paying her some attention annoyed and vexed me, that I saw clearly how intense my love for her is. You know, mother, how much before this, I have suffered. Imagine the power that Margaret's image has over me when I say that it has brought peace to a heart which, I thought, would never feel peace again. But then came a terrible question, or rather two—does

she love me?—and can I honourably think of her? Mother, I cannot, dare not answer them—you must.”

Mrs. Aston fondly took his hand. “Child, you have given me the hardest part to do, for do you not see that my answers may militate against each other? Remember, if Margaret Philipson loved you, I should be the last person to whom she would show it, although naturally the first to see it. But I will deal candidly with you, even as you have with me. Until the accident, I believe that her feelings were only those of ordinary friendship towards you, or else she had not analysed and fully discovered their nature. But since then I have seen a change, and one which, to my eyes was very apparent. If it conveys any comfort to you, my love, be assured of this, Margaret loves you.”

The son’s face flushed up with a momentary glow of pride, but soon fell again as he continued calmly.

“That ‘if’ reveals your answer to my second question. You think that I have no right to her, and ought in honour to give up all thoughts of her.”

“My dear Leonard, there lives no woman to whom I would rather see you married, or whom I would more willingly call ‘daughter.’ I have seen her much and love her very much, but, nevertheless, my son’s honour is very, very dear to me, far more so than my own life, and I tell you, I had rather die than hear him called dishonourable or a fortune-hunter. I know how pure your sentiments are regarding her, but the world does not, and you may trust the world for setting them in the worst light.”

Leonard looked up gloomily.

“It is true, the miserable disproportion of our respective fortunes would give it that appearance, I suppose. But I cannot help thinking that her father’s marriage ought to alter this. You know that now there will be every chance of an heir coming to Margrove, which would remove the only obstacle.”

Mrs. Aston rose from her seat and began pacing up and down the room, a favourite habit with her when in deep or perplexing thought. At length she stopped opposite her son, and laying her hand on his shoulder, said—

"A mother's love is a jealous thing, Leonard. I desire above all to see you united to Margaret Philipson, but it must be without spot or stain upon your honour. Take my advice. If Margaret love you, as I believe she does, it will do no harm to wait and see whether her position is to be changed by the birth of an heir; if so, you can then take her without compromising yourself, and cannot but rise in her estimation by so doing. Again: she is very young; are you sure that it would be quite right to ask her love when she has seen so little of the world, and for the last six months has been thrown almost exclusively in your society? You see I am trying to reason as well for her as for you. Nor do I think you would regret considering these things quietly and maturely."

Leonard continued to gaze into the fire intently, to all appearance concentrating his mind and energies upon the task of piling red-hot cinders one upon another. Silence continued for a few minutes, and then suddenly started up.

"Mother, you have spoken and advised well. It requires some uprooting of old plants before the soil is fairly prepared for the seed you would sow. But do not fear. What is to be done shall be done and thoroughly. Duty before all. Yes, you are right. It is only fair to allow for the change of circumstances she is now feeling, though I do not fear to trust her. Margrove, and the society she will see there, must needs differ widely from quiet Northmoor and the little cottage of the old maids. Yes, I am resolved. I will wait quietly and patiently, and see what time will do to bring us together; and mark me, my dear mother, I will not flinch from one accustomed duty or neglect one appointed task. All shall go on in trust and confidence. Mother, I trusted once and was deceived. If I were again—if my hopes were dashed to the ground—I could not live here any longer. I feel it would be perfectly maddening. But what a fool I am to think of this for a minute. Come here, mother dear," and he pressed his lips to her brow. "You have always been my best friend and adviser, but you have never done me greater service than this night. I feel, now that my mind is made up, more

peaceful and happy than I have for weeks and months. I have so feared the appearance of unfairly drawing her into an engagement, that I have, as you must have seen, altered my manner, until it was a perfect torture and I felt a hypocrite. At least, now I need not reproach myself. Now, mother, we will not speak of this again."

And with that strong will, which his mother called iron, he controlled himself in a moment, and at once passed on to some indifferent subject, nor did Margaret's name cross his lips again for many a day. His mother thought and said to herself, that the sword had been converted into the ploughshare; we shall see of what metal it was made and how finely tempered, in due time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CHAPTER ARISTOCRATICAL.

IT will only be paying a due and well deserved respect to the amiable and charming character of Mr. Philipson, if we make certain inquiries as to the nature of the alliance he has just formed, which I am sure we all desire may be for his happiness. But my reader, let me warn you, if you do not feel in a sufficiently grave and solemn mood, not rashly to begin the perusal of this chapter, in which you are about to be introduced into most high society, and be allowed to penetrate into the mysteries of the aristocracy. By a serious and decent attention, you may perhaps learn some very useful lessons in mental and moral deportment, such as the immortal Professor Turveydrop himself might endeavour to convey; wherefore let me exhort you to a properly impressive and humble spirit. There can be no doubt but that Edward Philipson had made an excellent and unexceptionable match, as far as birth is concerned, for Viscount Edginton was a very great man indeed, and held a high position in society, being one of the most deservedly popular of the English nobility. His wines, entrées, and morals, were all alike irreproachable; while his irresistible good temper, perfect breeding, and charming manners, made him beloved by all who had the honour of his acquaintance. In politics, a cool, cautious Whig, he never allowed his principles to interfere with his pleasures and friendships, but looked upon "the House" as an agreeable club, where, in addition to meeting all his friends and intimates, seeing the papers, and chatting over the last news, he was also at liberty to help in legislating for a few millions of people quite at his ease and without

any extra charge; still, on any great party question, the chief of his side could always rely upon his vote and interest—and what more could be desired of a partisan? Fully agreeing with those who hold that the way to men's hearts is through their mouths, Lord Edginton was specially careful that the commissariat department should be placed in the best possible hands, and so secured the assistance—services I dare not call it—of the noted M. Chaubert. Certainly nothing could surpass the exquisite little dinners in Park Lane, or the charming dejeuners Lady Edginton delighted in giving; nor did any one partake of the hospitality of any of their various mansions, without blessing the English constitution which preserves such noble specimens of the aristocracy. In appearance, Viscount Edginton was a tall, hale, rather handsome man of about sixty, whose bald head, was encircled by a halo or nimbus of lion-coloured hair, that is, that peculiar tint which hair once red assumes when it is turned to gray. He was always clean shorn and trim-looking, smooth and polished to the last degree, and so very courteous in his ordinary manner, as to make you wonder what kind of man he would be when enraged. Lady Edginton was quite the equal of her husband both in good looks and suavity of disposition; indeed they were cousins, as most of the Scotch appear to be, and there was a certain family resemblance between them. But alas, this worthy pair who appeared to possess all the world could give to make them happy, had one great source of discomfort in their children. Malcolm Forbes, the eldest son, who would in due time succeed to the title, though all that could be desired in character, was of so weakly and feeble a constitution, as scarcely to allow his parents any hopes of long life for him. Indeed, as soon as he left college, he was speedily despatched to the south of France, there to recruit and gather strength. Contrary to all expectations, however, he recovered not only to come back to England, but also to enter upon the matrimonial connection his parents so much desired. He had now been married several years, though without any family, and passed his time in alternate visits to his native country and hasty flights abroad on the approach of the severe

weather. Douglas Forbes, the second son, had, from quite his childhood, been his father's pet, and his career had been marked by a series of vexatious, indeed questionable, incidents which did not tend to endear his name even now. He was gifted with brilliant abilities and splendid talents, by the help of which he might, had he chosen, have carried off the highest honours at Eton and Oxford. What was the result? Viscount Edginton had a private hint that if he were not removed from the former place he would be summarily expelled, while at Christ Church he was rusticated, without any such preliminary at all, in consequence of some outrageous act of insubordination by which he had defied all college authorities. Upon this he removed his name from the college books in spite of his father's entreaties and threats, and decided upon proceeding abroad until his little escapades should be forgotten. In five years time he returned, handsomer than ever, and decorated with such a beard and mustache, as soon set all London—that is, all fashionable London—in a blaze of wonder. Nor was this the only renown he had achieved. In Italy, Turkey, and Egypt, he had distinguished himself by such deeds of extraordinary daring and courage, venturing his life in the most reckless manner to save that of a man, a child, or a dog (for he was equally indifferent which), as to have excited the unlimited wonder and comments of all who heard of them, as well as the suspicion and dislike of authorities generally. On his return in the height of the London Spring, when all reports united in condemning his elder brother to death, it was not remarkable that he became the lion of the season. He was welcome everywhere, petted, idolised, worshipped in a manner which would have turned the heads of most young men, but only had the effect of curving his flexible, panther-like mouth into a more settled and habitual sneer. All kinds of romantic reports were circulated about him: he was said to have some cruel disappointment in love, to have been taken prisoner among the Arabs, to have killed a man in a duel—nothing was too ridiculous to be credited about him; and to all questions relative to his adventures abroad, he listened with the same satirical, bantering look, and answered with the same

politely evasive reply. At last his father suggested diplomacy as the life most suited to him, and one at which his knowledge of foreign affairs and languages might render him of great service. To his surprise Douglas did not object—agreed to stand for one of the boroughs in his father's interest, and, indeed, rather shocked the Viscount, by asking what his political opinions were to be, declaring that either side would suit him equally well. He was returned by a large majority, and had much charmed his constituents by his addresses and pledges. For a time all went on well, he voted correctly, spoke occasionally, and very ably, and was thought a most valuable acquisition; but at length some great political crisis came, upon which he was to speak and act as one of the great guns of the evening. The fates ordered it otherwise. He allowed himself to be carried away unawares, and delivered, perhaps unconsciously, a magnificent oration, which was really a terrific attack upon the members of his own party. Never was such confusion known. The opposition were in roars of laughter and delight, as blow after blow fell upon the devoted ministerialists who writhed with dismay and rage, and yet though the bill was almost lost, and mainly through Douglas Forbes' unlucky Philippic, the calm manner in which he remarked that he was sorry he had forgotten his part and offered to turn round on himself and eat his own words, the next night almost disarmed the anger that was felt; of course he wrote to his constituency, and after resigning his seat, retired once more abroad from the reach of the burst of parental anger he knew he had well deserved. He visited England, and his father occasionally, and became a great favourite, in spite of his sarcastic manner at the clubs and other places of general assembly. He had, notwithstanding his political escapade, considerable powers as a partisan, when he chose to employ them. He had able arguments to convince the wavering, ridicule to force the weak, and brilliant sophisms, which he was wont to bring to bear upon those few who had real heart-felt convictions. It was strange to see how he delighted to mingle in political intrigue of all kinds, and what a mischievous pleasure he

took in the squabbles and confusion which every now and then will occur in such an atmosphere. No one could fathom his reasons—no one really appreciated the depth of a mind which, baffled in its other pursuits, and gradually consuming itself away, could only exist upon the battle-field of the mental energy. He might have represented many a place in Parliament again, had he so wished; and many were the proposals made to him upon that point. But his refusals, from whatever reason they sprung, were invariably firm and decided, and people naturally thought he feared another burst of unpleasantly timed eloquence might again occur to cast him down from the position he now again enjoyed. In general society he was feared rather than liked. Pitilessly sarcastic and with a keen polished wit, in his hands a most cutting weapon, he could sneer down a folly, a reputation, or a theory with the most faultless politeness. He seemed to care very little for ladies' society; and, indeed, always gave to those with whom he conversed, the impression that he was laughing equally at himself and them; and yet if he chose, he could be most tender, almost affectionate in manner, though all the real affection he possessed was lavished upon his sister Edith, with whom he had always had a firm alliance.

And this brings me to the daughters of the Viscount Edginton, who were two in number. Joan, the eldest, was of a gloomy, severe disposition, and morose temper, apt to take strange fancies and vehement dislikes. She had taken a strange and unnatural aversion towards her home and parents, from which no kindness would turn her. All they said or did she looked upon with suspicion and mistrust, and was never so happy as when she was away on some visit among the few friends her character and temper would allow her to form. In one of these excursions she became acquainted with Sir Archibald Millard, a Scotch baronet, of character somewhat resembling hers. Fanatically Calvinistic, his whole soul was absorbed in the consideration of the gloomy doctrine of Reprobation, which that sect allows. Joan and he met on equal ground, and formed a fierce kind of attachment. They diverged

occasionally, it may be supposed, from doctrinal to other no less congenial topics, for after a month's stay in the house of a mutual friend, the match was agreed upon between them, and Joan wrote to her parent's summoning them within a certain time, if they wished to see her before her wedding. The match, although no bad one in point of distinction and wealth, caused the deepest affliction to Lord and Lady Edginton, and made them cling with a mournful love to their only other daughter, Edith. She was one of those persons who are generally reputed to have "a great deal of character," which means a strong mind and will of their own, with sufficient originality to attract the notice of the world. Not remarkable for beauty, and distinguished by a certain calm, rather haughty repose of countenance, she was perfectly without any approach to vanity or any of the meaner vices. As a girl, she was daring and independent; fearless in her own nature, she had a deep sympathy with the wild career of her brother Douglas, whom she regarded with mingled feelings of love and curiosity—awe not being in her composition. The two were singularly alike, and from mere children had instinctively held together, and united in a sort of offensive and defensive alliance. Most unhappily, they had both been neglected, in comparison with the greater favourites, Malcolm and Joan, and the consequence was, that when the latter's unnatural treatment of her parents had turned their affections towards Edith, that young lady's haughty spirit caused her to reject the advances made and love proffered. She had so long felt cold and estranged, that she could not suddenly alter the tastes and habits of years; and feeling, or fancying that she felt only respect and duty towards her parents, as time advanced and her more mature age enabled her, she absented herself more and more from home. Strange to say, she never had received any matrimonial proposal, although mixing much in the world, and known to be a good match as far as money was concerned. She possessed a rather dangerous turn for satire and repartee, which frightened away not a few who were inclined to flutter round the Honourable Edith, for no man likes to

be ridiculed to his face, even if it be in manner allowed, and countenanced by the laws of society. So it came to pass, that she passed through several seasons without one acknowledged admirer, and as she was far above the little pettiness of ball-room flirtations, with rather the reputation of a clever but satirical blue stocking. Lord and Lady Edginton could not but feel vexed and annoyed at this, inasmuch as it appeared to reflect upon their management. The truth was, that their daughter Edith had nearly always been beyond their control or direction; and as time advanced and her very independent spirit developed itself, they found her still less so. The time for commands and injunctions had passed by with no effect: it was plain to see that advice, requests, and entreaties, had no great power over her. Yet Viscount Edginton might frequently have negotiated an alliance for his clever aristocratic daughter, had she but condescended to follow his advice and listen to his directions. But no, this would not do. She haughtily declined being made the subject of any intrigues—declared that she preferred managing her own concerns, and though obliged for the trouble hitherto taken, she had decided upon controlling her own plans for the future. With a spirit so hard and independent as this, little or nothing could be done. Life with her was wretched. On all important subjects, there was between her parents and her a tacitly agreed upon truce: to all trifles she showed a complete indifference. Her manner was, to all but Douglas, cold and unsympathising, to her father and mother, respectful and nothing more. Affairs were in this state; and Edith, at the age of thirty, when her brother proposed that she should accompany him on one of his tours abroad, and the offer was eagerly snatched at by all parties concerned. Lord and Lady Edginton seeing that they were to have no happiness in their children, were unfeignedly glad to be rid of their taciturn grave daughter. Edith, was delighted to be removed from her uncongenial home, and to be alone with her favourite brother and ally. Accordingly the two departed for the continent together, where they roamed as their fancy led them. They certainly were a most remarkable pair,

and one which, it seemed, as if nature never meant to be separated. They were never seen to so much advantage as in each others society. The cynical, ever sneering Douglas, was all devotion and assiduity to his sister, and seemed to take a pleasure in anticipating her every wish or desire. He would attend upon her in her walks and drives—read aloud to her—sing with or join in whatever plans she might have formed for the day, and all with such a cheerfulness and grace, as would scarcely be deemed credible by those who were in the habit of seeing him only in ordinary society. But Edith, for her part, repaid all this and with interest. She was, perhaps, the only person who really felt the vast extent of her brother's intellect, which she delighted to develop and draw out. She would listen to his schemes and theories, political and otherwise, and occasionally, by a remark, a question, or a doubt, start some debate in which he might show the full energies of his reasoning powers. For this purpose she really had to study, for she well knew how much it annoyed Douglas to be stopped by a question which betrayed ignorance, and called for a tedious explanation. But it was a labour of love to peruse those works which Douglas would sometimes mention as useful or desirable, and served, moreover, to call off her thoughts from less pleasant subjects. She could not disguise from herself the strange loneliness of her position: excepting Douglas, she felt that she had not a friend in the world, for she made but few acquaintances abroad, and for the most part avoided the English that she met, though there were not many who penetrated as far as Pau, the usual place of her residence. They had been abroad nearly five years, in which time Douglas had once or twice been over to England to see his parents, but Lord and Lady Edginton had at last become completely accustomed to the estrangement from their daughter, and had tasted too deeply of the sweets of liberty to desire her return. No overtures, therefore, were made. Edith was politely inquired after, and a few complimentary and civil phrases conveyed to and fro, but no invitation to return, and accordingly Edith found herself in reality expatriated and sent to Coventry. With the

usual perversity and contrariety of human nature, this vexed her. Although she would have refused if asked, yet it was rather humiliating not to be asked at all, and her mind began to brood over the possibility of a return to England more than she cared to show to herself. Other circumstances conspired to help this. Of late, Douglas had been somewhat restless and rather difficult to manage; his excursions from their place at Pau became more frequent—he was often moody—talked of the desultory life they led and the desirability of being more settled. Once he threw out a dark hint that he had a great mind to look out for a wife. Edith was alarmed. Without Douglas, life would be insupportably dull, and yet it really seemed as though he were slipping through her grasp. What could be done? Prevent his designs she knew by long experience she could not—was not the next best thing to anticipate them and provide for herself? And so almost insensibly her thoughts began to turn upon the subject matrimonial.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CHAPTER MATRIMONIAL.

DOUGLAS' threat of marriage was not entirely without foundation. At six-and-thirty he had begun to tire of the wandering life he had led, and to feel the want of a place he might call "home," and of some woman besides his sister who might take some slight interest in his plans and movements; not that there was the slightest particle of romance about him, or that the least tinge of sentiment entered into his ideas upon the subject. He pronounced himself rightly (or wrongly) incapable of giving or returning love, and resolved to be as slow, cautious, and deliberate in choosing his wife, as he usually was in concluding a bargain for any horse that had taken his fancy. He had not, as I have said, a favourable idea of mankind in general, and looked upon every human being as purchasable at a certain price, which, with some was money—with others position, varying according to the various dispositions to be dealt with. Daughters, of course, were the marketable possessions of their fathers; and the only necessity of making arrangements for matrimony was, accurately to judge the depth of that father's mind and expectations. With all this you must not think Douglas a heartless man. The great error had been in his very defective education at home and the lessons which his wide experience of the world had taught him—neither of these, separately, could have made him what he was. Had he received careful nurture and mental training in his early years, his after course in the world would only have enabled him to choose the good and refuse the evil, as it was his experience of the latter, unhappily, preponderated. World-worn and tempest-

tossed as he had been, his heart was not altogether bad—the difficulty was to probe and find it, under the thick coating of pride and indifference which long years had super-imposed. In his plans for himself, he did not forget Edith. He reasoned with himself, that if marriage was the thing for him, might it not be equally well suited for her? He could not, in the event of his own marriage, think of leaving his sister all alone in a foreign land, while, as to having her to live with him in any new establishment, he felt that was not to be thought of for an instant. Return to Lord and Lady Edginton was just as impossible, her proud spirit would never bend to that. No, she must marry, that was certain. And he set his very able mind to work in order to effect this end: working, as was his way, quietly but certainly, until he saw the time for action arrive. He had no compunction in so doing, because he well knew the spirit with which he had to deal. Edith, he felt sure, would enter upon such a plan quite as deliberately and coolly as he could. Once show her the necessity of marriage, and she would look at it as a business to be gone through. There was with her a decision and energy which carried her through any amount of difficulties as soon as her mind was made up. One great thing, too, was in his favour: there was no over-sensibility or romantic feelings to be encountered, no past memories to be supplanted or rooted up. The brother and sister were accordingly in this state of mind, when Douglas Forbes, while in Marseilles, was introduced to Mr. Philipson at the British Legation. Philipson was improved much by his foreign travels. He was, as I said at first, a handsome man, and possessed—what few in his position do—the great advantage of excellent taste and considerable tact, which, by the bye, had of late increased considerably. In dress he was quiet, gentlemanly, and unassuming; in conversation well-informed and lively, being able to use the various scraps and morsels of information which he had the art of picking up, and saving them up as a rather amusing pot-pourri or olla-podrida. He never obtruded his knowledge, wisely knowing it to be rather superficial than deep, but he could introduce sharp mosaic remarks and insert them in their proper place

and time, in a manner which certainly was effective and made him an agreeable companion. He was, it is true, somewhat fidgety, and at times not quite at his ease, but this wore off by degrees as he became excited and animated. Douglas Forbes saw him at his best; for while he wished to shine and make a good appearance, the awe he had for high birth restrained him from flippancy, just as his own natural vanity and self-confidence kept him from any vulgar cringing. The consequence was, that he really pleased his new acquaintance; and Forbes went so far as to hint that he should be glad to see him at Pau, if he intended coming that way. The wily Douglas then commenced a series of inquiries relative to Philipson's birth and position. Here, however, he was somewhat baffled. All he could learn was, that he was very wealthy, had good introductions to various families abroad, was well received at the various Embassies, and universally esteemed as an agreeable and gentlemanly companion. Nor did he meet with better success as to his inquiries from English friends to whom he wrote. It was plain, they wrote, that Philipson was well off—had some ten or fifteen thousand a-year, a very pretty estate at Margrove, where he was building a fine house; and to this was added on, by those very well informed people, that he had great "expectations," though from what source was not known. This looked well. He was a commoner, it was true, but then commoners continually married the younger daughters of the nobility. Edith had not very much, nor could she expect much more at the Viscount's death. She certainly might do worse than to marry this wealthy Philipson. A little incident occurred while at Marseilles to raise the already good opinion he had formed of him. Careless in his expenditure and inaccurate in accounts, Forbes had considerably anticipated his quarter, and found himself unpleasantly short, and what is called "hard pushed." A chance expression made Philipson acquainted with this, and with equal tact and good grace he took advantage of the first opportunity to put his pocket-book in Douglas' hand and beg him to help himself as he pleased. His proud spirit could really find nothing to object to in the way it was done, and with some difficulty he accepted a loan for two or three hundred

pounds. Philipson refused to hear the amount, and immediately burnt the note of hand, which the other proffered him, saying that his word was quite sufficient. Forbes had not often been treated in this way, and even *his* cautious nature could not refuse admiration to an act so liberally conceived and so gracefully performed. He renewed his invitation to Pau, which Philipson, with a well-feigned carelessness accepted, and accordingly made his appearance there in a week or ten days afterwards. Meanwhile Douglas had laid the train which his arrival was to fire. He again threw out hints about marriage; complained of being tired of France and desirous of settling finally in England, perhaps near his parents; dilated upon an invitation he had received from Sir Archibald and Lady Millard, and very unnecessarily asked Edith whether she would like to accompany him. He threw a little regret into the tone in which he mentioned his refusal of another invitation from his parents, and talked so feelingly about the duty of rendering happy their declining years, that Edith began to feel as if she were the sole obstacle to all his plans as well as to the happiness of her family. News came at this time, most opportunely, of the renewed ill-health of Malcolm, who was now banished to Madeira altogether. Douglas spoke delicately, but regretfully of the certainty to his succeeding to the title, of his estrangement from his native land, and the loss of the influence he ought naturally to have in Parliament. Edith began to feel the ground slipping under her feet. It was intolerable to become a mere impediment to her favourite brother: what right had she to complain or feel hurt?—the time was past when she could save him, and now she was a clog round him which prevented him from rising and soaring as he would. She saw that the impending separation ought, by rights, to emanate from herself—she ought to be the person to release him from this burden, which she had been the means of imposing upon him, and, if she waited longer, perhaps the initiative might be taken from her, which was too humiliating to be thought of. So she resolved in her own mind to take the very first opening which offered to release her from a disagreeable and anomalous position. She was in this state

of mind when Mr. Philipson arrived at, and took apartments in Pau. Douglas had slightly mentioned him before, but in cautious and wary terms. To praise him highly or speak much in his favour would be, he knew, the surest way to make Edith suspect some scheme, and set her against him. So he merely spoke of him as an agreeable, gentlemanly friend he had made at Marseilles to whom he stood under some obligation, and asked permission to present him, which was readily accorded. Possibly Philipson began to see through the game already, but as he knew that he, at all events, should be a gainer, and it suited his own plans and desires, he fell into his proper part with a ready adaptability which years of scheming had effectually taught him. To Edith his manners were those of respectful, though easy politeness, tinged with regard; and as things progressed gradually, with slight tenderness, love, he knew, was not required. She, for her part, looked upon him first with curiosity, then, as she felt how much his arrival had removed the dullness and ennui she usually experienced, with thankfulness. At this stage, a kind of dreamy wonder whether he might ever become anything more, took possession of her, and from her frequent meditations upon this, wonder at length changed into a wish, languid, perhaps, at first, but in time, as she saw the advantages and circumstances, urged her on, more decided. She counted up, Robinson Crusoe fashion, the respective advantages and disadvantages which she might expect to derive. On the one side, she saw the comforts of a settled home of her own, entire independence from her family, and the disappointment of sister Joan, who had once pronounced oracularly, that Edith was far too self-willed and flighty to get any man to take her, and freedom from the feeling of being a drag upon her brother Douglas. All these were decided advantages, and her state of mind will best be shown by the little fact that Edward Philipson, *quâ* husband, was not even thought of. And what were the disadvantages to be put down *per contra*? Simply the fact of marrying a wealthy commoner; and she decided that her love and reverence of aristocracy was not sufficient to deter her; besides, indeed, if looked at in the proper light, this

was really a gain to her, inasmuch as it placed her in the superior position of giving and not receiving honour. So the result of all this agitation was, the decision that Mr. Philipson would "do." In the meantime he had not been idle, but had pressed his suit in both quarters, his own scheming brain enabling him to see the service he might render both brother and sister. To Douglas, he casually spoke of his intention of entering Parliament, a hint which immediately set that artful politician at work. Why should he not, he at once reflected, use all his influence to return Philipson if he became his brother-in-law? He would be a useful tool in his hands—put him in possession of an extra vote at any rate, and might also serve as warming-pan or "*locum tenens*" for any nominee of his own or even for himself. Here was a combination not to be carelessly rejected. Again, Philipson one day spoke of Margaret as a girl of some beauty, and threw out hints that she would be wealthy even in the event of his marriage. Now Douglas, though cynical, was not mean or grasping. Wealth he did not care to acquire, for as he knew that he must be immediate heir to the title on his brother's death, of the nearness of which there could be no reasonable doubt, he could afford to dispense both with money and high birth in any matrimonial connection he might make. He had decided upon taking the popular side in his future political career, and saw at once the advantage of connecting himself intimately with the wealthy middle class, the views of which it was his desire to represent and advocate. Now Philipson was rich, agreeable, and gentlemanly, and his name, whatever his origin might be, certainly was not connected with any trade or manufactory which might be unpleasant. So with this card in his own hand, he clearly saw how much it was to his interest to forward his sister's match as much as possible; and it was not long before his gentle hints and suggestions, though couched in the most careless and general terms, brought Edward Philipson to the desired point. He revealed the state of his mind, I cannot say affections, to Douglas, and besought his influence with his fair sister. Need I say that this was promptly and readily acceded to, and complied with. The Honourable Edith's reply was,

that she would think of it. And she *did* think of it, and turned it over and over again for many a weary hour, until at length unable to bear the dreary prospect which a refusal opened out to her, she intimated, through her brother, that Mr. Philipson would be received favourably by her. It is doubtful to which this gave the greater pleasure, the lover or the brother. The former had at length attained the summit of his desires—a wife, whose name and title would reflect some lustre upon him and raise him in the eyes of all his neighbours; the latter had achieved a great triumph, provided well for his sister, liberated himself from what he began to feel a wearisome burden, and at the same time done all this at no inconvenience, nay, at a positive advantage to himself. A hasty removal from Pau to Paris was the immediate result of all this scheming, where after a due pause, the nuptials were celebrated in a very quiet manner, the mature ages of the parties concerned, to say nothing of certain private wishes of their own, determining them to this course. The bridal tour was curtailed to the smallest possible limits, for 'as he knew Margrove to be nearly approaching completion, Mr. Philipson was desirous of conducting his new wife there as soon as possible. It was on this excursion, a few days after the happy event, that the two letters to his sister and daughter, which we have before noticed, were despatched, as well as the request for the photograph, which soon made its appearance with the letter of congratulation from Margaret. Not content with his own elevation, Mr. Philipson had now decided upon advancing his daughter also, and at the same time removing her out of the way of the step-mother, with whom contact might be unpleasant. He did not know that Douglas Forbes' mind was already speculating upon the same point, and revolving different schemes by which it might be effected. He took good care, therefore, to put, as if by chance, the excellent photograph of his very beautiful daughter where he might see it. Although not romantically attached to beauty, Douglas certainly preferred it to ugliness; and the sight of Margaret's lovely face had the decided effect of influencing him more in favour of a scheme which had always seemed hopeful and feasible. Then, too, the actual

fact of its *being* a scheme, gave it a charm in his eyes, which an ordinary match, however desirable, could not bestow. Nothing definite had been said upon either side, until one morning at breakfast, when Edith was not present, Philipson suddenly looked up and asked his brother-in-law to come to Margrove. That was the first open move, but no one would have thought, from the good-humoured, careless way in which the invitation was conveyed, how much was concealed beneath.

"I'll tell you what, Forbes," he said, "you might do worse than to come and stay with us a few weeks, before you make any definite arrangements for settling in England. I think you would like Margrove, and flatter myself that we should get on well together."

Forbes stroked his moustache, perhaps to conceal a smile, as he answered, "I have no doubt about that."

"I will be perfectly candid with you," resumed Mr. Philipson, "and will not conceal the fact that you might be of great use. You have heard I have some intention of entering Parliament, and have no doubt but that I should stand a good chance at Marbury; now you know your presence just then might be of great service, and would, I think, have an influence on my election: not, of course, that I ask you for that, but I know that your talents lie chiefly in the parliamentary line, and thought that perhaps you might like to assist in returning for Parliament, a man of your own views. What say you?"

Forbes paused in the careful stroking of his moustache and answered readily, "There is a great deal in what you say. From all I can tell, you would do admirably for Marbury; and though, perhaps, you are inclined to overrate my influence, still, perhaps, I might be of some use to you in the way of giving hints about all that kind of thing."

They were rapidly approaching a good understanding, and as Philipson sipped his Lafitte and tapped his egg, he remarked carelessly, "You know, I should not mind spending as much as would be required to do the thing handsomely and advance the good cause. I have, thank goodness, enough and to spare, even after providing well for my little Margaret, who will not do badly, even should there come an heir for Margrove. However, all this

is anticipating, and upon subjects which I should not discuss with any one that I did not feel so intimate with as I do with you. May I calculate upon your help and good word, then?"

"Reckon upon it as yours, Philipson," was the ready answer from Forbes, who began to see that their wishes tended to the same point. "I know your principles in political matters, and they march with my own. I think, between us, we may manage the thing easily. Let me see—there can be no formidable opposition, I should think."

"They have talked of young Trevennen at times, but I don't think he would have much chance. Of course he would stand for the landed interest."

"Yes, to be sure. But, if he is the worst antagonist to be encountered, the thing is sure : a word to my club will do it."

After due thanks and acknowledgments, Philipson, satisfied with his success upon this point, passed on to indifferent subjects. The fine view before them led to a comparison of Cuyp, Claude, and Turner, whose respective merits he appeared to have studied deeply, and, indeed, *had* done so—in the guide books. Landscapes led to photography, photography by a gentle twist, led most naturally to portraits, and at last, from portraits in general, they passed to portraits in particular, and so to that of Margaret, which he found, apparently with some difficulty, having hidden it away himself the night before so as to seem more natural. He talked so prettily and affectionately of the "pretty little puffs," his "little pearl," and such caressing epithets, that Forbes saw at once he had either to do with a very fond father or a liar of the first water. But Mr. Philipson had far too much tact to dwell over long upon the subject, which he soon changed, when he thought it had had its due effect. In the end, although no definite arrangement was come to or concluded, the two schemers parted pretty well understanding each other, and seeing how far their interests coincided. The end of all this was, that Edith was informed of the invitation given and accepted, on which she signified her entire approval—pleased at what she believed to be a delicate attention from her husband ; and so it was finally arranged that the two should spend Christmas in Paris, and return to England, New Year's Eve.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RETURN.

THE last day of the old year had come. The hedges and trees were whitened with rime and frost; and from the yellow-gray fog which usurped the place of the sky, it was evident that there would be a fall of snow before night to whiten the old year's grave. About four o'clock the yellow fog culminated and focussed into one western spot, through which slight beams of orangey-red tried to shine; there was a brief struggle between light and darkness, of which the result was a transient, rosy beam, for a moment gladdening the earth. Then all was over. The sun had set, and the coming shades began to close in fast, as they always do at that time of the year. The wind was roused into momentary activity. White-headed trees and bushes solemnly swayed themselves backwards and forwards, and scattered their hoary powder upon the chill air. But as soon as the wind dropped, a few feathery snow flakes began to fall and drift along, then to lodge and accumulate, until they fell thicker and thicker, faster and faster, and filled the air with their gamefome revelry. Margaret had watched all this as she paced up and down the carriage-drive which led to her father's house, wrapped up closely in her dark gray cloak, the hood of which she had pulled over her head. She paced up and down ceaselessly, enjoying the keen fresh breeze which swept by the slight ascent to Margrove, and rejoicing in having completed the somewhat troublesome labours, which for some fortnight past had incessantly occupied her. All was prepared within, though the travellers were not expected until seven o'clock, nearly three hours from that time, so Margaret betook herself to

the carriage-drive, and inhaled the wintry air. She mentally reviewed the past year in which so much had happened, and wondered whether the coming one would resemble it in ought. It had been *the* year of her life. All her previous history was contained and bounded by the dull routine of her fashionable London school, from which she had so suddenly been removed. Her father's visit, and their journey to Northmoor, how minutely they were photographed in her memory! And then the dear little cottage, and those two kind, good aunts, who had been so tender, the very thought of them and of their kindness brought the tears into her eyes, when she reflected how deeply they must feel her departure and her father's ingratitude and harshness. Then a full tide of memories came sweeping in upon her connected with Maffingbury and Gaunt House. The occupants of the former she had not seen for some time, as they were in town. But though she did not regret this much in the case of Arthur, from whom, for several reasons, she thought it better to be absent, yet she could not remember the warm hospitality and sincere kindness of Mrs. Trevennen, without sorrow and gratitude. When she allowed her mind to wander on to that spot, which of all others she loved best, her pace was somewhat quickened, and perhaps a rosy flush might have been seen under that dark gray hood. She had tried, and not altogether in vain, to discipline her mind upon this point, and did not indulge in reveries as much as she had been accustomed to. But now her thoughts flowed on unchecked, and she found herself able to think of Leonard without that violent throbbing of the heart she usually experienced. That he loved her she felt sure: his tenderness and minute attentions had sufficiently proved that, and she was too deeply convinced of the goodness of his heart and the sincerity of his affection, to regard him as influenced by anything but regard and consideration for her in what, at one time, she had thought was coldness or estrangement. "I will not believe Leonard," thought she, "anything but the noble, chivalrous mind I have always seen." As for Sybil, she now felt ashamed of the petty jealousy and suspicion which had made her fancy Leonard in love with his cousin, and mentally

resolved to try and gain some of Sybil's grand points of character, that she might make herself more worthy of Leonard's regard. As she was thus thinking, she had unconsciously prolonged her walk as far as the large iron gate which opened upon the drive, and against this she lent for a few minutes, lost in a maze of not unpleasant thoughts. She was roused by the sound of a horse coming by, and looking up hastily, recognised Mr. Aston. It was too late to turn away, even had she wished it, without absolute rudeness, and so she frankly stood still until Leonard rode up to her side.

"Good evening, Miss Philipson," he began in somewhat cheerful tones; "this is a most fortunate meeting on my part, for I had scarcely dared to expect you out on such an afternoon. Are you not afraid of the snow? Well, I am burdened with kind wishes and remembrances both from Northmoor, where I called on my way, and Gaunt House, to which please to add my own. Your aunts intrusted me with this note for you," and as he spoke, he leant forward and gave her a little twist of paper, on which she recognised the cramped handwriting of aunt Kate.

"Thank you very much," was her reply. "I hope that I have not brought you far out of your road this drear day."

"Not a bit—not a bit. I must pass by here to Standlake, where I am bound on business. But I must not detain you from your letter. Good-bye, Margaret, and may the next year be a very, very happy one to you. God bless you."

He bent over and warmly pressed the hand she extended, as she looked up trustfully and said, "Good-bye, Leonard. My best love to your mamma and all my kind friends."

The faces of both wore a blush, for, for the first time, they had called each other by their Christian names. One long look of affection they indulged in, and then Leonard, setting spurs to his horse, galloped off at full speed, not venturing to look back, while Margaret slowly retraced her steps to the house, as the snow was now falling fast and thick. She opened and read her note, which, though brief and evidently hurriedly written, was full of affection and love for her. Aunt Kate begged her not to think of her father's unkindness to them, or to imagine it should ever dif-

turb the feelings with which they both should always regard her. She would always be to them the same that they had found her at Northmoor; and should ever a day of distress come upon her, she was to remember them, and come to them as her natural place of refuge. It was strange how the good ladies seemed to dwell upon this latter contingency with fond reiteration, though, at present, nothing appeared less likely to occur. But offers of help are never ill-timed and always welcome. Margaret pressed the letter to her lips, and vowed that nothing should ever make her forget the kindness and tenderness of those two warm-hearted aunts, whom the world called "old maids."

The stable clock struck six from its lofty turret as she ran up the flight of stone steps which led to the hall, and remembering that she had only one more hour before the travellers would arrive, she made a tour of inspection of the various rooms, anterior to her own toilette. Margrove was now a very fine place, and immensely improved. Under the care of the able architect in whose hands it had been placed, it had assumed an air of tasteful elegance it had never worn before, besides many great additions and enlargements. The new buildings had been executed in pure Gothic, and abounded in carving of the most beautiful kind, besides an unsparing employment of inlaid marbles and mosaic work. The furnishing and interior decorations exhibited Mr. Philipson's good taste. All was of the best and handsomest description—no display or gaudy tinsel to betray the *parvenu*. In the minor arrangements, Margaret had displayed her own elegance of mind. Choice flowers in vases, stood about in various positions; a few books and drawings were left upon the drawing-room table; and the closely drawn curtains drank in the cheerful blaze of the fire within the rich masses of their draping.

Margaret's toilette did not occupy much time, and she quickly descended to her post in the drawing-room, looking very pretty in her light sea-green silk, which, with its rich black lace, suited her fair complexion. She paced up and down the drawing-room, wondering what the new mamma would be like. It was rather a strange position, expecting a father she had seldom, and a mother-in-law she had never,

seen, and a few anxious thoughts naturally occupied her heart. "Will she be kind and loving in manner, or haughty and repelling. I wonder how old she is too. Papa's letter does not give any clue to that. And oh, how will papa himself be?" She thought of the old stiffness and aversion with which he used formerly to receive her, and trembled at the thought that it might come all over again. At length, however, she chided herself for unnecessarily anticipating what might never happen, and resolved to omit nothing of warmth in her reception of him. The distant sound of wheels, muffled by the snow, fell upon her ear. It came nearer and nearer, and in a moment she heard the carriage stop in the front of the house. Pressing her hand upon her heart to try and still its rebellious flutterings, she went into the hall just as Mr. Philipson led a tall elegant looking lady up the steps. In a moment she was clasped in his arms, and was greeted as "My dear Margaret," then gently disengaging himself, he took her hand and presented her to his companion, as "Your new mamma, my dear." Margaret, with timid fondness, bent forward and both gave and received a warm kiss, which left no doubt about its heartiness, while a kind, though grave voice, whispered in her ear, "I am sure we shall be good friends, my dear." At this point a sudden idea seemed to strike Mr. Philipson, and turning round, he said, "How very forgetful of me. Pray forgive me, Forbes," and pointing to a tall, dark figure which stood behind, shrouded in cloaks and wrappers, he said, "Margaret, let me introduce you to the Honourable Douglas Forbes. Forbes—my daughter Margaret." That young lady was just conscious of a pair of brilliant, dark eyes bent down upon her, and a moultachioed face muttering something about being "delighted;" but her surprise at finding a stranger she had not expected, did not allow of much reflection or elegance in her bow. The party entered the hall, Mr. Philipson burning with secret, though concealed curiosity and pride, on seeing his new abode. He would not for the world have betrayed any surprise or delight, which, he thought, would not become him, but went about, remarking "Very neat, very neat; yes, yes, I see they have carried out my directions,"

until they all retired to their several rooms to dress. After a few minutes Margaret ran up to Edith's room to ask whether she might assist her. She seemed pleased at the attention and dismissed her maid, beginning to converse with her newly found daughter-in-law. She looked very well in her sweeping violet, brocaded robe, and beautiful, cloudy lace. There was a quiet langour, almost indifference, in all her movements, which was just what one would have expected from her cold, calm face, and rather stern brow. She could look pleased, however, and almost coloured with pleasure when Margaret put into her hand a bouquet of azaleas and heaths, which she had arranged with much care, and she stooped and again pressed her lips to her daughter's brow, saying, "I like your flowers better than all, and your kindness in thinking of them." As they turned to go down, her eye caught a morocco case upon the dressing table. She opened it without the slightest emotion of surprise or pleasure, and found therein a bracelet of emeralds and diamonds, a present from Mr. Philipson. She evidently regarded it as a perfectly natural and in no wise remarkable event, and there was a quiet scorn in her eye, as she clasped it round her arm, which was strange to behold. It was quite evident that her husband and his presents were less than nothing to her. They moved down stairs where they met Mr. Philipson not in a very good temper, having discovered most of his luggage to have been left behind at Calais; nor was his frame of mind improved when, on his asking with assumed sprightliness whether Edith had found anything on her table, he was answered in a most nonchalant manner, "Ah, yes. Thank you. Emeralds and diamonds—very neat." He muttered something about "sixty pounds worth being worth decent thanks," to which his wife was deaf. It was rather provoking, too, to find that she took not the slightest notice of the luxuries and beauties by which she was surrounded, in spite of many ingenious attempts on his part to call her attention to them in an off-hand careless way. Carving, gilding, and painting, seemed quite thrown away upon her, nor dare he say much in their praise, lest he should be thought unaccustomed to such style. At length Douglas came into the room. He looked very handsome, though

rather saturnine, with his black eyes, dark hair and moustache, and brown complexion. His mouth was the most remarkable feature of his face. There was a certain flexible curve and occasional nervous twitch about the corners of his mouth, which showed in full force when he was satirical or sneering, and gave the impression of a panther about to spring. As he entered, he took in at one glance the expressions of the various faces he beheld and almost their thoughts. "My sweet brother-in-law thought he, is fidgety and cross; Edith is tired and rather fullen; the girl Margaret is half frightened at both and looks stupid. I wonder whether her father ever beats her, I could quite believe it. I am too weary to talk, but I will listen and draw her out quietly." His arrival and the announcement of dinner was a great relief from the deadly stagnation which was fast taking possession of them. During that meal, the conversation was chiefly kept up by Philipson, and Margaret saw with pain and surprise, with how very little attention or interest Edith seemed to regard him. She answered mechanically to his questions, and occasionally bowed assent to some remark of his, but all in a set, petrified manner, and with no more appearance of interest, than if it were to the most indifferent person. Once he seemed vexed, and uttered something sharp, which showed that he was not fully broken in to this treatment. A cold stare was all he received for his audacity, and there was an undeniable sense of relief when the ladies left the room. Douglas had not missed a single expression which had passed over Margaret's face during dinner, although he sat nearly silent, and apparently engrossed with the business of the table. Once in the drawing-room alone, the spell was removed from Edith, and she said, as she threw herself back in an easy chair, "Come, dear, and bring that low chair beside me. There sit down so that I can just see you, and tell me all you please of your history. I like to hear you talk." Thus encouraged, Margaret sat down as directed, within reach of the jewelled hand, which every now and then would smooth and caress her curls. She began relating such parts of her quiet life's story as she thought most likely to give amusement, and was still so employed when

the gentlemen came in, having risen somewhat early. There was a look of surprise on both of their faces at seeing Edith and Margaret upon such intimate terms already, but no remark was made. Mr. Philipson, it seemed, was in a better mood, and began to chat with Margaret in a way that amazed her beyond all expression; but in spite of all his endeavours at being agreeable and witty, conversation languished. He felt that he had utterly failed to surprise and overwhelm his bride with his grandeur and display. She absolutely refused to play Semele to his Jupiter, and he consumed in his blaze of glory. It was certainly provoking to the highest degree to behold her wearily reclined in her lounging chair, gently fanning herself with a fan of peacock's feathers—his present—and looking supremely indifferent to all the assemblage of buhl, and gilding, and marquetry. If she had come direct from the diamond palace in the Arabian Nights, she could not have appeared more unconcerned. It was quite evident she was bored. As for Forbes, he had apparently come to the conclusion that all the party were out of sorts and had best be left to themselves, for after firing off a few rounds of small shot in the way of remarks and suggestions, he retired wearily into a corner, and yawned softly into a stereoscope which he appeared to be admiring. Dead silence for five minutes. The fan moves faster than ever. Mr. Philipson begins to wind his watch, and with some ingenuity, breaks the main spring. Something unlike a blessing escapes his lips, to cover which misdemeanour he turns to unfortunate Margaret, who is now examining views of Italy."

"I should like to hear you sing, Margaret—suppose you give us some music, and open the piano."

Forbes anticipates her, and arranges the stool and desk; apparently he thinks that even school-girl singing is better than that mouldering silence. Edith wakes up to life for a minute, and looks pleased, so pleased, that Margaret is encouraged to ask what the song shall be.

"You know what you like best, my dear. Let it be something soft and melancholy."

Margaret looks over her portfolio, and selects "Douglas," forgetting the resemblance of name with one of her auditors.

Do any of you, my dear readers, male or female, know that song? If not, pray by all means try to hear it well sung; but do not all of you sing it, for it is far too good to become common and hackneyed, and far too full of expression to suit every voice. It is the lament of a wife for her husband dead on the field of battle. In life she has not valued him enough, nor fully known his worth, his tenderness, and truth, for he was a man of "few words," though his whole heart, and all his life was hers. But, when he lies rigid and cold on the battle plain, dyed red with his blood, and his white face upturned to the gleaming moon, what can she do but lament with a grief too deep for tears, as she cries that she was not half good enough for him, and implores him to come back to her once more. Margaret sang it perfectly, in a soft, low, wailing voice, dwelling tenderly upon the refrain "Douglas." It was evident she felt it entirely. There was a general murmur of applause when she had finished. Mr. Philipson said, "very pretty indeed," and condescended to nod approval. Edith said little, but half whispered to Margaret as she passed to her seat, "Thank you, dear; you have made me feel as I have not done for years, as if I could shed tears."

And what did Forbes say or do? When he first saw the title of the song, the old cynical smile and panther-like curve of the mouth came into play. "Why, this girl must either be the veriest bungler in existence, or the most daring coquette imaginable, to sing this rubbish on my name, with me standing by." So he stood by quietly waiting the conclusion to utter one of his polite sarcasms. However, as the "rubbish" proceeded, his face changed, and gradually assumed an appearance of interest, of enjoyment, and at length fairly deepened into one of intense pleasure. He devoured every note, and at the end, the earnest "Thank you very much," of that world-worn man, was a far higher compliment to Margaret than the rapturous exclamations of half-a-score of Italian masters. He did not avoid her after this, and really kept up quite a lively conversation with her until the time when the household broke up for the night.

Such was the return to Margrove.

CHAPTER XXI.

S C H E M I N G.

THREE weeks had passed since Mr. Philipson's return to Margrove, when one morning as the party were seated at breakfast, a telegram was brought for Douglas Forbes. Apparently he already knew perfectly its contents, for he did not seem in the slightest hurry to read it, but let it lie by the side of his plate and continued to sip his coffee with most irritating nonchalance. Perhaps there is nothing more provoking to a fidgety, curious man, than to see an unopened letter directed to some one else, but yet within his own reach. Mr. Philipson felt this acutely, and literally burned to tear open the missive. He nervously suggested, "perhaps it required an answer—the man might be waiting," &c., but all had no effect on that tiresome Douglas, who took the keenest pleasure in teasing his host in his own quiet manner. At length, however, he condescended to take it up and read it with a quiet smile, which plainly said, "I thought so." He tossed it over the table to Philipson, remarking, "It concerns you somewhat—just read it." That gentleman received it, and read with delight the following message—"Old Masham is dead. You must put up your man as soon as possible. Let us know all full particulars." His face beamed as he said, "My *dear* fellow! why, this is most important. You see we shall be in the earliest possession of the field. How *very* good of you to procure such early intelligence." All the answer he received was, "I'll tell you what, Philipson, your cook boils these eggs too long. I wish you would tell her that I never eat one boiled more than three minutes;" and Douglas, pushing his egg away, turned to some potted lobster,

as if it were a far more important matter than any electioneering intelligence which could possibly arrive. He continued to talk in an easy, bantering manner upon the most indifferent subjects, all throughout breakfast time. At last, however, he rose, and putting his hand upon his brother-in-law's shoulder said, "Come along to the study. I see you are ready to burst, so I suppose I must open a safety valve." The study—so called, upon the "*lucus a non lucendo*" principle—was a fine, large apartment, the furnishing of which, Philipson had placed in the hands of an eminent book-feller. Consequently, there was an assemblage of some five or six hundred volumes, splendidly bound and of exquisite typography, the insides of which he had never yet even peeped into. But it looked very learned and business-like, and the whole room had a literary air about it which was quite imposing, imposing, that is, in a double sense. There was the great table, bedecked with newspapers, periodicals, and pamphlets; bundles of letters and papers bound up with red tape, occupied a second table, which was relieved by taper and inkstands, letter weights, scales, and such other literary paraphernalia. It was rather an amusing sight to watch those two men. The master of the house careered and ambled up and down the room in a dreadful state of pleasure and fidget. He took up a paper-knife, and twisted it about until it broke—he nervously arranged and re-arranged his bundles of letters—he trimmed his nails till he cut his finger, and flung the knife away; and all this time a constant stream of suggestions, thanks, proposals, counter proposals, and confused ideas flowed from his mouth.

Douglas, on the other hand, had taken up his position at once on the very centre of the hearth with his back to the fire, and his hands behind him, alternately warming them at the blaze or pausing to pull at his whiskers and stroke his moustache. He looked on with an amused smile at his nervous companion, but too wise to interrupt or stop him, he let him run on at full speed until he was at last exhausted and paused for a reply.

Then he began, "Quite so, what you say is all very nice, and that sort of thing. Patriotism and all the rest you know. Very proper sentiments, and highly to be applauded.

Now hear what I've got to say. I can put the thing in a nut-shell. If you will trust implicitly to *me*, and put your cause in *my* hands, do *what* I say, and *as* I say, I'll secure you your return for Marbury without fail, and what is more, at just one-half what you think the expense will be. My club will come forward, I know, for a man I propose, and one who will represent our principles. Only you must do as I say, and leave me to manage all that. I see what you are thinking of," continued he, observing a slight wrinkling of Philipson's brow, "you think you are going to be made a puppet of and made to play second fiddle. I tell you it will be no such thing. To all appearance you, and you only, shall have the whole and sole management of things, and shall be as grand as you please. But what does it signify to us, here in this study, whether I draw up proclamations and you sign them, or you have the bother of writing them all yourself? Nonsense man, don't think I want to lead you. It would take a better man than I am to do that, you know."

This little piece of flattery settled the matter. Philipson extended his hand, all thanks and gratitude.

"My dear Forbes, you overwhelm me with your kindness. I could not do better than under your guidance, I am sure. Ah, now I shall look upon success as certain. Dear me, dear me, how very fortunate I am in having such a friend."

Perhaps there was more of an expression of scorn on the "friends" face at that moment than would quite have pleased him, had he been sufficiently himself to observe it. After a moment's silence, Forbes startled him by saying abruptly, "well now, what is to be my reward for all this?"

"My dear friend," replied Philipson, taken aback and really not seeing his drift, "you have only to name it. My eternal gratitude I don't mention, though you know I am your servant for life. But name what you please; should there be any desire unfulfilled of yours—any wish unaccomplished, you have only to speak. Ah, yes, you know anything, I quite mean it." He paused, desirous of gaining time, and rather anticipating a fearful loan would be requested.

"Thank you," said Forbes, quickly, "all very nice and proper. Quite so. That means that I shall be welcome to

a diamond ring or snuff-box as a token, &c. I fly higher, man, I tell you. You have a daughter," added he, in a semi-tragic comic manner.

Philipson who had expected an attack upon his ducats, was considerably relieved when he found that it was only his daughter who was wanted. "I have," said he, in a modest tone, "and I may say a charming one. But I am partial you know. Perhaps too much so."

"Exactly," remarked Forbes, with an evil grin on his face. "I fear, perhaps, you love her so much that you can never prevail upon yourself to part with her. But fathers, you know—even the most tender ones—must expect such things. Come now, what should you say to me as a son-in-law?"

His host clapped his hand to his forehead (which sounded hollow), then with a well-feigned ecstasy of rapture, he cried, "What should I say? Why, what could I say, but that my fondest, proudest wishes would be more than realised—that I should be the happiest man in England, and ah—" and at a loss for words he clapped his head again, as if to make sure there was something in it.

"Don't whack yourself like that, man," remarked his would-be son-in-law, coolly, "or you will get a head-ache and be unfit for electioneering. I suppose you mean you'll have me. Very well. But suppose the young lady refuses—you know they do sometimes."

"I should like to see her," said Philipson, forgetting for a moment his proper part, as a fond papa, "dismiss that thought, my dear Forbes; she'll do as I tell her. I will speak to her."

"You'll do no such thing," said the other roughly. "You'll let her alone, if you please. If I wanted a slave, I could have bought one in Georgia easily. I want a wife, man, I tell you; and if she won't become that willingly, why I won't have her on any other terms. So perhaps you'll be good enough to let her decide as she likes." Then observing Philipson to look crest-fallen, he continued. "Now to business. Who is the Mayor of Marbury, a Radical? Yes? Well, that's all right."

"He's an upholsterer, a very respectable man, and quite in my interest."

"Very well, that will do. Now you must just send down and order fifty pounds worth of furniture of him to-day, which you can burn if you please when it arrives, as that is all I expect it will be good for; then write him a note later in the day and ask him to dinner, tell any lie you please—say you want him to be introduced to me—and to-morrow you shall have a requisition to stand for the borough of which he is an ornament. Now, good-bye." So speaking, he left the room.

Scarcely was the door closed behind him, when Philipson burst out, "Impudent, mocking rascal! I should like to wring his sneering head off his shoulders, and so I would if he were not so useful to me. Well, at all events, I have done well. I have secured my seat and got rid of my daughter. Then, too, he is sure to be a lord one day. Well, a title surely covers a multitude of sins." He would have been pleased, could he have heard his would-be son-in-law's remark of "lying, fawning scoundrel. He is almost too mean and despicable to live. But he does not know I am playing my own game; and Margaret—I think you are worth it."

It is wonderful what unanimity of action and sentiment there is when person's interests coincide on one point. With such powerful reasons on both sides for promoting Mr. Philipson's election, all things went as smoothly and rapidly as could be desired. Forbes' influence was immense; nor was his brother-in-law wrong in thinking that it would be sufficient to procure him his return. A daily correspondence was maintained with his club in London, whence emanated the plan for the campaign, together with full instructions as to its successful management and carrying on. Forbes was everywhere, and seemed to possess the gift of ubiquity. He felt himself in his own element, and threw all his energies into his present employment in a manner which was enough to secure success. He dictated in private, those addresses which appeared under Philipson's name—he drew up rough draughts of speeches to be made by that gentleman at future periods—he threw out suggestions for squibs, placards, libels, and pasquinades, with such happy facility, that were the admiration of his

whole party. Arthur Trevennen did not come forward, partly because the hopelessness of the contest was seen at first, and partly because his natural timidity rendered him too averse to the whole scheme. So Mr. Philipson's only antagonist was a certain Sir Hargreave Pollen, who was far from popular in the county, as to either his character, which was hard and dry, or his politics, which were high and dry. There was no doubt but that Philipson would come in, and with a large majority. All this time Forbes was watching Margaret with deep curiosity and interest, and quietly biding his time. He had been greatly and unexpectedly attracted to her, and taken by her simple gentleness and pleasing manners, such as he had not been accustomed to for a long time. Edith, too, whenever they had any conversation, never failed to speak in her praise, not that she either suspected or desired her brother's intended match, but from the real affection with which she regarded her step-daughter, who had never altered in her affectionate attentions towards her. Edith and Margaret were excellent friends, and the sweetness of the latter's disposition had much softened the world-hardened nature of the other. So under the new *régime*, Margaret's life was far more peaceful than she could have expected with her father, whose dislike was in reality unabated, though circumstances did not allow him to manifest it openly. Douglas found many opportunities of long conversations with Margaret, indeed he insisted upon making her of use, and would give her long manifestoes to copy, under the pretence of keeping her employed, but, in reality, to have her near him. But with all this, he was simply melting and thawing from his ice-bound state, under Margaret's gentle influence, not really in love. One day, soon before the election, when his labours were nearly over, he had watched her walking backwards and forwards on the terrace under the study windows. At length his patience gave way, and flinging up the casement, he leaped out and joined her.

"I am almost tired to death of all this," was his remark.

"Tired—I thought you enjoyed it so!" was her natural rejoinder, remembering the immense energy he had shown.

"Then you were wrong, very wrong. I no more care

for this turmoil than you do for that pebble," said he, flinging away a stone as he spoke—"how could you imagine such a thing?"

"Then why are you so busy and always troubling about it?"

"Do you think persons always do what they like? or take up any employment from the pure interest they feel therein? I do all this from the worst of reasons—to escape from myself and my own thoughts, the hardest thing to accomplish. We may escape from our country, our friends, and our enemies, but ourselves we cannot evade. But I am telling you of things you have not, cannot experience. Does it sound strange and hard?"

"It sounds very sad to hear you speak in this way. Are you really so unhappy? Is it possible for any one to be so, who has not done any great crime?"

"Unhappy, as you say, Margaret—you won't mind my calling you so—my nature is too fierce to allow me to be any more than the reverse; and 'crime' is a vague term which varies according to the mind of the person using it. Perhaps what you would call crime, would seem light to me."

Margaret looked up in alarm.

"Do not look so frightened, little one, as if I were a Manfred, or Lara, or some such terrible one. You must absolve me and pity me. I like such pity as yours, which is neither contemptuous nor self-righteous."

"I scarcely like to hear you speak so. You have such powers and talents, I am sure they ought to make you distinguished and happy. No one can ever be so despairingly unhappy, save through their own fault."

"Do not say so, child; how can you know, who have lived a peaceful, innocent, happy little life, without any of those stormy tempests which make mere avalanches of some men's, aye, of some women's, hearts. Talents—what are they? Mine, I believe, were only given me for my torment and plague."

"Please do not talk so, it seems so dreadful. I cannot think that you, who I know have so much that is good, were ever meant to be so wretched as your words imply. Do you not think, that perhaps you have looked too exclusively at the evil of the world?"

“Where, then, is the good to be found?”

“By all who look for it. Will you try this? A person who does not believe it is wretched.”

“Margaret, do you know, that in your simple way, you teach and preach more than a synagogue full of male and female Pharisees? Now, my sister Joan, simply calls me a vessel of reprobation, and condemns me to everlasting misery as quietly as she would put an old letter in the fire. Even Edith is too much occupied with the world and her own thoughts, to observe the storm which sweeps over my moral Sahara. But you hold out hopes. Do you know, you would make me have a better opinion of my fellow-creatures before long. Here am I, twice your age, who have been all over Europe, and disputed and argued with Priests and Cardinals, Rabbins, and wise-men of all climes, and yet you—you little white thing, whom I could crush in my grasp like a bird—you are the first person to tell me that I have failed to find good in the world, because I did not look for it! What business have you to be so wise, you blossom, that you can preach peace to a rugged, gnarled, twisted old oak like me? I wish there were more of you, you should all be in a garden together, and I would call it Paradise.”

“My wisdom, as you call it, is slight enough. You know how to find peace as well and better than I do, only you do not practise it. I wish you would try, Mr. Forbes; you will be a happier man, and your eyes will be less keen to the faults and evil of the world when you see your own. Pardon me,” added she, blushing deeply; “I fear I am very rude, and said more than I intended. But I felt earnestly, and forgot how young and childish I really am.”

“Pardon you!—nay, it is I who have to thank you for making me feel more like a human being than I have for many a long year. Margaret, I shall depend upon you for your help and advice—you do me good. What, going!” as he saw her preparing to enter the house. “Nay, I must not be selfish and engross you. Good-bye.”

They parted; and as he continued his lounge upon the terrace, he muttered to himself, “That girl might make what she pleased of me.”

CHAPTER XXII.

CONFESSIONS.

NATIVE worth had been recognised, and virtue, for once, had some further reward than itself. In other words, Mr. Philipson was returned by a triumphant majority for the borough of Marbury, had taken his seat and all kinds of oaths, and now was entitled to add M.P. to his name. This had been effected mainly through the exertions of his able brother-in-law, Douglas Forbes, who, whatever motives we may suppose to have influenced him, had certainly worked in the most indefatigable manner. All this had occurred quite early in the spring, and together with the consequent balls, fêtes, and dinner parties which Philipson had felt it his duty to give, were now, in the lapse of time, looked upon as matters of the past. He certainly had attained the great aim of his life—namely, to become a county man. How incessantly, though quietly, he had worked to his end, from the moment of his purchasing what was then called Margrove Lodge, to that when he entered it, magnified and improved into Margrove Hall, with the Honourable Edith Philipson upon his arm as his bride, none could tell. And yet he had never lost sight of it for a single instant; and though certainly the unexpected accession of fortune we have heard of had been the great and immediate cause of his success, yet so untiring and concentrated were his energies when roused to a particular cause of action, that I firmly believe that he would have achieved the desired result ultimately, although, perhaps, with greater labour and delay. But no one could deny that he was now a man of importance. He interchanged visits

with the first people of the county, who gave to the parliamentary title and the aristocratic wife, what they would have withheld from the man. Under the guidance and direction of Forbes, as well indeed as of Edith, who could exert herself when her own affairs were in danger of compromise, his fashionable education was nearly completed, and he possessed the outer gloss and manners, as well as all the inward vices of the most accomplished "gentleman." The parties they had given at Margrove had been pronounced most successful, and the presence of the heir-apparent to the Viscounty of Edginton—for Malcolm had at last departed this life—tended to throw a lustre over them which attracted many. The Honourable Mrs. Philipson's weak health had kept her and Margaret at Margrove all the spring, instead of moving up to town and taking possession of the splendid house in Eaton Square, which Mr. Philipson had engaged as the scene of his parliamentary labours. He had gone up, however, and stayed there generally, occasionally hurrying down to the country for a few days' recreation; and when it was found that he was likely to become a father about September, it was decided that they should remove to town early in August, in spite of its dullness, so as to have the advantage of the very best advice. Those few months which Margaret had spent alone with her step-mother, were so peaceful and happy, as almost to recal to her mind the old times of Northmoor. Though Edith had never altered her cold demeanour towards her husband, whom she both disliked and despised, her friendly sincere manner to Margaret remained unchanged. It was something so new to her to be treated with real genuine affection, such as Margaret always showed towards her, that the deep passions of her heart, pent up as they had been for years, and only occasionally finding a vent in Douglas, now flowed in a deep though natural current. She made Margaret her constant companion and friend, took the greatest pleasure in her confidences and little pleasures, and above all, tried to make her tell all her former life and history. Whether she suspected the true state of her step-daughter's affections for

Leonard Aston, or was simply moved by the desire of obliging Margaret, I cannot say, but, certainly, one day she astonished and delighted her by proposing a drive to Gaunt House and Northmoor. The call was accordingly made; and as Edith put out all her powers of being agreeable and charming, and went, moreover, in high good humour, it would be hard to say which side felt the greatest pleasure. Leonard unfortunately was away, but Mrs. Aston did not fail to give the fondest welcome to her old friend and almost daughter Margaret, and dwelt with a fond reiteration upon all the scenes of the last autumn, which was very touching. Nor was the visit to Northmoor less charming, though a certain fear and suspicion entertained by the two aunts that it was a secret undertaking and compromise, rendered their manners somewhat stiffer and more formal than they usually were. But though the ice had thus been broken, Margaret felt that she could not expect to see much of her friends, her aunts' proper sense of dignity and wounded respect preventing them from returning the visit in which their brother did not join; and Mrs. Aston feeling instinctively the distance between the hall and the old farm too much to care to visit on such unequal terms. So that she did not expect greater results than that of convincing her friends she had not forgotten them.

One warm evening in summer, as she was strolling up and down the terrace by herself, and admiring the beautiful view which looked out upon the town of Marbury, she heard a manly tread behind her, and turning round saw Douglas Forbes advancing. She was too much accustomed to his sudden movements and rapid descents upon them, when they believed him to be in London, to feel much surprise, and accordingly advanced to meet him with the frank cordiality which was her natural manner.

"I think it is impossible to surprise you, little one," said he, with pretended annoyance; "you always take one's arrival as a matter of course."

"What would you have me to say or do," asked she laughing, "pretend to be very much surprised and alarmed, or look very frightened?"

"I can remember a day when you *did* look all of those at once, and made me the queerest little bow in the world. Do you remember New Year's Eve when we arrived? I should like to know what your thoughts were then."

"I dare say you would. But I am not at all sure that I remember them all. I know fear of you predominated rather."

"What could you see to fear in me, you silly child; why, you are not afraid of me now, are you? Do you think I bite?"

"I am not afraid *of* you now, though I fear for you at times. But I know you better."

"Do you," said he earnestly, "do you think you know me better? Well, I hope so, and yet, perhaps, I ought rather to wish you did not. There is little to know of me, and that little is no good. Margaret, I have something to tell you, and yet, do you know, I have not courage. Help me. Put that honest little hand into mine, look me in the face sincerely, and say from your heart, 'Douglas, I pity you from my heart, and desire your happiness.' I need not tell you not to say it at all, unless it is from your heart. Now," and he held out his hand. She complied, and put her little white hand into that extended to her, saying, as she lifted up her eyes trustingly towards him and gazed him honestly in the face, "Mr. Forbes, I do pity you, and I do desire your entire happiness."

"Good girl," he said, approvingly, "you have done what many could do deceitfully or faithlessly, but what I believe you only could do sincerely. Now, listen to me, Margaret, while I make a confession—I mean, while I relate you the history of a friend. You will have to give a decision, so attend, though some parts may seem wild and strange to you. I had, or have, what, for brevity and distinctness sake, I may call a friend, and his history it is I must tell you. He was born, like myself, of noble parents, and received the kind of education that is usually given. As to his character, he had some great faults, such as pride, hot temper, and almost uncontrolled inclination; but, on the whole, he was not bad, and had some redeeming points.

He had no trace of envy about him, was truthful and affectionate. But what was the use of all this to him? In good hands, and under careful treatment, he might have turned out well; but managed as he was as a child, he became—well, what he now is. There was little love and affection shown him; much dry precept, but no example set him to follow. He was taught religion just as he was taught Greek, only with less care and less results. He was told to be clever and distinguish himself, and not disgrace his name—by what? By crime or wickedness—oh no, but by ungentlemanly conduct; and so to act the gentleman and achieve fame, was all that was impressed upon him. He had no father's love or mother's care, for they were great people in the fashionable world, and could not be troubled with such things. He was unhappy, too, in his brothers and sisters. The only one he could have respected was removed by death—the only one he loved, unhappily, by mistaken fondness, rather fostered and increased his bad points, to the neglect of the little good he had. Well, what was the result? He went to school, to a large public school, where his talents might have gained him distinction and honour. But he saw no use in these; and unaccustomed to check or control his slightest whim or wish, soon became noted as the most headstrong and daring that the school contained. He left it in disgrace, and repeated the same career at the university to which he went. Hitherto, however, his misdemeanours had been pardonable, and more the result of want of discipline than anything else; but with increased age, came a change. He went abroad, and plunged headlong into every folly and vice which came before his notice. What was to restrain him? His education? It had been that of the mind, not the heart. Love? Pure love he had never known: his ties to his family were slight—to them he was almost a stranger. You say religion. True, little one, but where was he to learn it? It had not been instilled into him when young—how should he acquire it now? He was not an infidel, or one of those presumptuous persons who need a creed made especially to suit themselves and their own narrow minds. No: I say, had

he been early shown the real beauty of true religion, he would not have fallen as he did. But it was too late now; and with a sense of disgrace to drive him on, and no check or rein imposed to stop or guide him, he went on from worse to worse. I have passed over his deeds of evil, and will not, therefore, specify any acts of good which his better part stirred him to do. But it is sufficient to say, that he was unspairing in periling his life in defence of others. Perhaps this was pride, perhaps a recklessness of being and half despair. Margaret, do you pity this man? Nay, I see you do in your tell-tale eyes. Oh, child, if I could weep for the sorrows of others, who cannot shed a tear for my own! Well, my friend returned after a time to his native land. Various things made that fickle thing, the world of fashion, receive him with enthusiasm, just as they would receive and pet a new singer, a hippopotamus, or a dwarf. He was welcomed everywhere; was looked upon as a lion, and though a younger son, esteemed a good match. Well, he mixed in the world much, and what did he see? Lying, deceit, and selfishness on all sides. But some good you will say. Possibly, but the world had not taught him how to look for that. It had taught him much about titles, and wealth, and honour, but goodness, and purity, and truth, no, not one word. Here was this young man—*young* I mean in years—but already old in heart, without one friend to tell him a word of truth or to say boldly, ‘you are miserable and I pity you from my heart.’ You will say no one was intimate enough. Bah! if you saw a man walking head foremost into an abyss, should you refuse to warn him, because you were not formerly introduced to him? A word, a look, just then would have started and roused him to a consciousness of his misery and unfriended position. That word was not spoken, that look was not given, and so, instead of being softened, he was hardened, and learnt to sneer and laugh at things which he should have wept at. He could not see any truth, or purity, or beauty in the world, and so he denied that they existed. And all this time the world he hated and despised so, was

lavishing its careffes upon him, and trying to poison the air he breathed more and more. Margaret, was he to be entirely blamed for his misery ? was it all self-caused ? Your face says, no, and you are right. But I need not show you every page of my friend's life ; it will be enough to say that he was never so wretched, never felt so forlorn, as when he was being received in every house in London, where every place was open to him, and night after night was passed in a whirl of delirious pleasure. After again offending his father and rendering himself, for the time being, a world's wonder, he again left England, and this time with a near female relative who was to live with him—don't start, Margaret, but hear me to the end. Years passed on and found him neither better or worse, happier or more wretched. He had tried at times to stifle remorse and grief by plunging into dissipation or political intrigue, but it was no use. Just then, when both brother and sister were beginning to feel weary of their sojourn abroad, perhaps almost of each other, there came a rich Englishman abroad to the place where they lived. This man was a widower, with one daughter. I will not be hard upon him, but I may say that he was mean, selfish, and cruel. He was desirous of marrying, and my friend's sister saw that it would suit her to be married. Not that she loved the man—no, love had almost died within her heart ; but both she and her brother reasoned coldly and calmly that such a marriage was expedient and well suited to their position. It took place. The three removed to England, to this man's house. But now, Margaret, I have the worst to tell of my friend. He came with the cool, deliberate intention, of marrying the daughter of his brother-in-law ! Don't start, Margaret, you must hear to the close. He came, caring nothing (I must do him the justice to say) for her money, but also caring nothing whether she were good and loveable, or whether she felt affection for him. The bargain was made coolly and deliberately, and he meant to go through it. But how ? Oh, Margaret, you are rightly indignant and disgusted with him, but listen to the manner in which he was punished. He found a girl, I cannot say how fair, but her beauty touched even that

iron heart. He found a disposition both gentle and firm, all goodness and purity, and a simple, touching, confiding innocence, that, for the first time, made him see his own blackness, and vileness, and degradation in their real colors. This was the woman whose affections he had come to gain in this cold, matter of form way; and do you think he could look upon her without deep remorse? or was it wonderful that he should feel his whole being so filled by her gentle image as to leave no room for any other emotions than love of her and contempt for himself? I say boldly, that the first happy thoughts, the first unselfish reflections, the first peaceful, pure, or ennobling ideas that had passed through his brain for years and years, were caused by this woman. And now he stands before her—for it is I, Margaret, of whom I have spoken; and he asks whether it is possible for her to pity and pardon so wretched a creature, or to regard him with any other sentiments than contempt. Margaret, I have not spared myself—I have not shrunk from any feelings of shame in telling you all my history. I have neither kept back nor added anything, but told all—the simple truth. It seemed the only atonement, as it were, that I could make you for having entertained thoughts or desires unworthy of you. But, oh! Margaret, consider, and do not answer me hurriedly. You might be to me my very saving—you might be the one, by your love, to rescue me from my state of wretchedness. As my wife, your love would soften all that is hard, would strengthen what is weak, would teach me in a child-like, loving way, all that I should know. Dear Margaret, think of this, I beg of you. But without it, without this help and safe-guard, how can I answer for myself, that old habits of years may not prevail over what may prove only a fever of repentance and remorse? Will you think of this, Margaret? I can, for my part, promise you the entire, undivided, intense love of a heart which the world has not utterly spoilt and corrupted. I would be true, loving, and tender, and would submit—nay, ask for any test or trial that you may approve. But if you cannot think of me in this way—and you best know

your own heart—at least then we may part, I trust, as friends, and I may take with me, wherever I may go, your good wishes and prayers.”

Douglas ceased, and looked up beseechingly in his companion's face, who showed by her tears how much she had been touched by his confession. When she had somewhat overcome her emotion, she began—

“Mr. Forbes, I honour and respect you from my very heart; and I tell you faithfully, that I could be proud and fond of you as my brother. I think that you have shown the greatest self-control and manly resolution I have ever seen, and I cannot but feel pleasure at having been made the object of it. My sincere respect, regard—nay more—affection, is, and will always be yours; but love I have not to give, for I love another.”

She said these few words so simply and with a maidenly modesty that at once touched Douglas' heart, and made him regret almost having caused the necessity of their being uttered, and he hastened to relieve her at once from what he felt must be an embarrassing position.

“That was spoken like yourself, Margaret, and I know you too well to think of adding one word which might give you pain. Nay more, I can say, truly and unselfishly, that I am glad—very glad, that you have found a place to bestow your love, and, if you choose it, it must be, I am sure, worthy. It was asking too much, I know, to expect you to link your fate to such a one as I am. But you forgive me?”

“Forgive is not a word for me. You have done me no wrong. Oh, Mr. Forbes, let me speak all I feel; let me speak, indeed, as a sister to you. I do, indeed, see that much of your folly—nay, crime—has been caused by the ill-training of the world. You despise and hate it justly. But do not stop there. It is not enough to hate, you must do more; you must do your part, your duty, towards improving it. Think what a position you will occupy. You will have all the world can give you—wealth, position, titles, besides much which it cannot give, a noble disposition, a heart which I am sure is not far wrong, and splendid

talents. Oh, Mr. Forbes, give me reason to be proud of you, and when I hear of your deeds of wisdom, and charity, and goodness, then let me feel, 'this is done by my brother.' I can, I do promise you my thoughts, my wishes, and my prayers ; but do not rest content with this. You do not need me to tell you whom you have offended, and whose pardon you must seek. Dear Mr. Forbes, do not think of me but as your most sincere friend—more I may not be ; but that I promise you faithfully. I shall see you again often, I hope ; there can be no reason why we should not meet."

She held out her hand, which Douglas pressed to his lips, and said—"Be it so, Margaret, if it may not be more. Had you acted less frankly and wisely, I should either have become desperate or been frozen and hardened. But I feel neither—only your words have melted and calmed me. I will not forget them. I do not pretend to say that at this moment I feel fully prepared to appreciate the sisterhood you offer in the place of what I had desired. It is not in the nature of man to do so all at once. But it will come, Margaret—it will come ; and I will try and never disgrace that friendship of which you offer to make me the object. As you wish it, I will not go away, and will try to learn resignation to the part I have to play. Perhaps the occasional sight of you may inspire me, and cheer me on not to relax in my efforts. Good-bye, Margaret, good-bye, little sister, as I must call you. It will be long before I forget this conversation."

He turned away abruptly, but not before he had softly and gently pressed his lips to her brow—such a kiss a brother might give and a sister take—and then resolutely walked away, and in a few minutes his horse's hoofs could be heard ringing on their way to Marbury. Margaret had been greatly agitated throughout this trying interview, and could scarcely summon courage to meet Edith that evening. An hour's quiet rest and reflection, however, restored her to herself, and she laid down to rest thankful, and not regretting the events of the day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OF MANY THINGS.

THIS will be a broken chapter, reader, one in which the unities will be disregarded ; time will be given you to take breath and consider, while a series of pictures are shown you, as in a glass, the interpretation whereof belongeth to the wise. The first, then, is the drawing-room of Margrove ; the time, the evening before the removal to town ; the persons present are Margaret and her step-mother. They are in precisely the same position and attitude that they were that cold January night, when Edith first came to her new home. She reclines in her easy chair, softly caressing, and smoothing with jewelled hand, the shining locks of her step-daughter, who sits in the little, low chair at her side. The attitude, I say, and movement is the same, but the face and expression are different.

"I could not have thought, my dear, that I should ever have felt so sorry in leaving Margrove as I do ; but then I did not know you when first I arrived here, and all was strange and cold."

"And I am sure, mamma, I little thought I should ever have loved so much the grand lady whose arrival I dreaded so."

"Were you so much afraid of me then, my child ? Did you think I should be cruel, and harsh, or distant to you ?"

"I scarcely knew what to expect or fear, but all seemed very strange. I was afraid you would think me so childish and silly."

A gentle kiss was the only reply.

"And I fear you have, at times, found me hard and cold, Margaret ?"

"No indeed, mamma : to me you have been all that is kind

and loving. Had you been my own mamma in reality, you could not have been more kind or gentle. I never saw her; so that you are really the only mother I can remember. I like to think of this."

"Ah, my dear, your own nature it is which makes you see this. Your life must have been a dearth of love. Tell me one thing, Margaret—how have you managed always to be so affectionate and respectful to your father, who, I may say, shows in every way that he does not love you? I really want to know this."

Her step-daughter's face saddened as she answered—"Mamma, I have always tried to regard him and treat him, not as he is, but as I wished him to be. That has made me resolutely close my eyes to his faults, and forget all his unkindness to me. I would not think of him thus, but tried to look at him, as I knew I should, if either of us were on our death-beds. It has sometimes, I acknowledge, been hard; but then I knew it was my duty so to do, and I struggled against all the bitter thoughts that sometimes rose. Perhaps when he has another little one to love, his heart may find some affection for his daughter."

These words were as sharp daggers to Edith. She could not but feel how she was judged and condemned therein. There was Margaret, who for years had borne with cold neglect, indeed harsh treatment, from her father, and yet could speak of him with respect, and even affection: but she, who had never been crossed or thwarted by her fond parents, ever most kind and loving to her—what had been her conduct? utterly estranged, she had regarded them with coldness and indifference, and scarce paid them the scant measure of respect which the world claimed at her hands. After all, what were her fancied wrongs and hardships but mere indulgence of caprice and temper, as compared with Margaret's real injuries? This was food for a mind not uncandid or ungenerous to think over, and it was with a feeling of real respect and gratitude that she kissed her step-daughter and said, "you teach me much, Margaret, and I wish I were like you more and more every day. Your love and friendship repays me for much."

Edith is far from perfect, reader, but you must grant this is a great improvement from the old hard spirit of New Year's Eve. Spirits like these who have had years given them to hew them out chambers in the heart, to overlay them with cedar and ceil them with vermillion, will not be driven out and exorcised by the first drop of holy water which is cast at them. They cling firm, and take mighty grasp at the lowest depths, and it is only by a certain rending up the tough old heart strings and crooked branching roots which have so ramified and spread, that at last these spirits perceive, indeed, the axe at the root of the trees in which they build, and fly away with brimstone tears and noisy despair. A contest of this kind must be with foot well planted, helm on head, and strong right hand with glittering sword uplifted to strike again and again blows straight upon the very life. Dragons and such like grisly beasts and foul reptiles have a tenacious clutch of life and must be cut to bits, piece by piece, till we see them lie prone lifeless, and their fear is over.

A few days more saw the whole party in London, at No. 27, Eaton Square. Mr. Philipson had met them in good humour, and rather more "fuffy" than usual. His career, which had all along been prosperous, had now culminated in the honour of a visit from his father and mother-in-law, Lord and Lady Edginton. Various reasons had moved the worthy couple to this step. In the first place, as Edith was married, and it was irrevocable, there was no use in unnecessarily showing their annoyance and vexation to the world by repudiating or discountenancing the match, especially also as the world had decided upon receiving Philipson into its magic circle. It would be very bad taste for the Park Lane establishment to "cut" that of Eaton Square. Besides, too, what reason could be given? No one seemed to know what Philipson's birth actually was; there was only a faint suspicion that it was not quite the thing. He was rich, gentlemanly, and in parliament—what more could be desired? Douglas, however, had done most to bring this union about. Besides using those arguments derived from "what the world would say," of

which his own experience had shown him the value, he touched, though cautiously, upon the extreme desirability of some mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, now that the mother and daughter would be in such close quarters, and spoke of Edith's altered manners in a way, perhaps, scarcely warranted by truth. All these various motives and reasons, mingled as they ever are in this world, tended to the good end of reconciliation, of which, to tell the truth, Edith, for her part, was equally desirous. In almost daily expectation of herself becoming a mother, her thoughts naturally reverted to her own treatment of her parents, and she could not pronounce it faultless, or contemplate in future the prospect of such conduct to herself without aversion. Atonement with her generous nature rapidly followed acknowledgment of error, and the consequence was, that she came to town softened and tranquilised, and fully prepared not only to receive, but to make advances to an entire reconciliation. Mr. Philipson regarded what he saw of all this with unmixed satisfaction and pleasure, not that he cared in the least whether his wife and her parents agreed or disagreed, but simply because he saw that their reconciliation would add redoubled lustre to himself. He now could frequently count upon Viscount and Lady Edginton as his guests and intimates, and accordingly a grand series of parties and balls was decided upon as long as Edith's health would allow. He had been a little puzzled at Douglas Forbes' enigmatical behaviour with respect to Margaret, and had been unable to discover whether he still entertained any serious thoughts about her. After the first day of the election business, when he broached the subject, he had not uttered another word relating to it. It might not be a bad thing, then, to have a few balls, and so on, where Margaret should make her *début* in the London world, and perhaps the attention she was sure to receive from others, would stir up Forbes to greater activity. From the day of their arrival there, the *Morning Post* has, constant occasion to chronicle the receptions of the Hon. Mrs. Philipson, at which all those eligibles, whom the lateness of the season yet detained, were to be met. The Edgintons,

of course, were there frequently, accompanied generally by Douglas, who now resided with them in a kind of semi-detached house of his own. There was nothing in his manner which could in the least disturb or embarrass Margaret. He treated her with the kind regard which their intimacy, and almost relationship, warranted; but it would have been impossible to have guessed, that once he had been her suitor. His presence, however, and conversation were a great relief to Margaret in what she found a very dull routine of life. The constant round of paying and receiving visits, of riding and driving, of dressing and ball going, were inexpressibly tedious to her, wearying as she was for the clear, sharp air of Margrove, or the delightful shade of Northmoor and Gaunt House. She was too free from vanity, personal or mental, to care for the adulation she received, which she found intolerably insipid after Leonard's clear, deep stream of conversation, or Douglas' shrewd, pithy remarks. She felt treated like a well-dressed doll, rather than a human being with a heart, a mind, and a soul, and was indignant accordingly. One person, indeed, connected with her dearly loved country-life was there, but, unfortunately, the very person she least wished to see, namely, Arthur Trevennen, who just at this time was in town. It was impossible to disguise the fact from herself that, in spite of the little encouragement he had received, the poor boy was deeply in love. His attentions were most assiduous and pointed, too much so, in fact; for Margaret always felt that he drew general attention to her, and most ungratefully wished her admirer safe at Maffingbury again.

And yet poor Arthur's was rather a hard case, and one which shows how often the best arranged schemes are upset and frustrated, where the inclinations of the parties concerned have not been consulted. It had been the pet scheme of his mother's life to arrange a match between her son and Lady Dynevor, only daughter of the Marchioness of Downshire. The two mothers were in very similar situations: friends in youth, of good birth, good marriage, both widows, and both with only children. It was far from an unnatural or unfeasible thing, especially as the children were nearly equals



in age—the superiority belonging to Arthur—and both of amiable, perhaps rather weak dispositions; but all apparently facile and flexible characters have a certain hidden spring of resistance. It may be a long while before this is discovered: wheels, and bands, and machinery generally, may appear to work with the utmost regularity and order, but once touch this spring and point of resilience, and whiz! all the labour of years is undone in a moment, and the limits of the master engineer's power discovered. So it was with Arthur. He had been thrown in Lady Constance's way, admired her elegance, good breeding, and sweet temper, liked her as a friend, but as his wife—no, never. His mother had not thought it worth while to consult him on this point. To her, sons and daughters were the pawns of the great chess-board of life. They might be moved and played about at pleasure, and assume bishopricks, castles, knight-hoods, and such other dignities as the state of the game rendered desirable; only, of course, the idea of the pawn's being consulted as to his moves, was absurd in the highest degree. Now, as it happened in this particular case, the pawn in question had a mind and opinion of its own, and had resolved on a certain line of action, quite contrary to that mapped out for it by the mistress of the game. Arthur thought, and with some reason, that if he were not to be consulted about his future wife, he might as well be consulted about nothing at all. He fell into all his mother's plans, therefore, with seeming alacrity, which, however, only covered a firm resolve of his own. To Lady Constance he was polite and even cordial, but whenever Mrs. Trevennen approached the dangerous subject of matrimony, he manifested such a calm obstinacy and dense obtuseness, as to make her resolved to "bide her time." At this juncture it was that she committed the fatal blunder of allowing him to become acquainted with Margaret at Northmoor. It is strange how the most clear-sighted people will often fail in a really important point. Nothing could have been thought of more likely to estrange his affections even more from Lady Constance than a friendship with Margaret, and yet Mrs. Trevennen, forgetting all in the pleasure of seeing

the daughter of her old friend, both began and promoted this intimacy as if she had no other designs for her son. It was not at all wonderful, then, that Arthur in the frequent habit of seeing Margaret, fell so deeply in love with her, as only persons of his enthusiastic and imaginative disposition can do. This affection survived the long absence which her removal to Margrove rendered necessary; and now that they were once more brought into collision in London, seemed to burn with greater fervor than ever, spite of the little encouragement it received. Poor Arthur, however, was blind to Margaret's indifference, and only waited a fitting opportunity to formally open his suit, and brave his mother's indignation.

August was passed, September come, and had brought with it the anxiously expected son and heir. Every one was delighted. Mr. Philipson was in a state of rapturous bliss, and in good humour with every one. He praised himself—his wife—the baby—Douglas—everybody. He had at last attained the summit of his ambition, and remedied all the blunders of the early part of his life. Look at him as he sits in his easy-chair in the library. He would not form a bad picture of self-satisfaction—his head thrown back, his eyes half-closed, his hands pressed together with a nervous or fidgety energy. What are his thoughts? Of all kinds. He has reviewed his past life, and has come to the pleasing decision that all the good of it is owing to himself; while the bad—which with him means he unfortunate portion—was mainly brought about by the wickedness of the world. At the close of nearly fifty years of life, he finds nothing to reproach himself with, and so he leans back comfortably, and exhorts his soul to enjoy those good things which a well-judging Fortune had prepared. He has played his cards well. It is true that the great stupidity of Kate Hardman in marrying him had hampered him at first, but that was not his fault, any more than the birth of a daughter in the stead of a son. But then, how well he had managed to get on with all the Marbury people, so that his accession of fortune was regarded by all of them as placing him in his proper position. His alliance

also with the Edginton family through Edith, his election for Marbury, the proposed match between Douglas and Margaret, and now, to crown all, the birth of an heir—what could have been managed better? Then his thoughts flew off to the question of what that son should be. He had always thought it a mistake in the Church that a young man of rank and fortune could not be made a bishop at once, without submitting to the degradation of curacies and such pitiful ungentlemanly employments. But since such was the law, why the church must suffer for it by not being able to number his son among its ministers. The army and diplomacy appeared to him the most eligible courses open; but after all, as the son and heir was only two hours' old, there would be time to fix that, and perhaps the best thing would be to settle who were to be invited to the christening.

As Margaret does not seem to enter into her father's thoughts, perhaps we may as well try to discover the state of that young lady's mind by a visit. She shall be, therefore, the subject of the third of that series of pictures that I promised you. There was a certain small inconvenient room, high up and with a back aspect, which she had selected as her own among all the apartments of the grand mansion in Eaton Square. The mere fact of its looking out upon a waste of roofs, skylights, and chimneys, had influenced her in this remarkable choice, from which she would not be laughed. To her mind, there was something weird and marvellous in the strange prospect, unromantic as it appeared. But an imaginative mind—and who at nineteen is not, to some extent, imaginative—sees more in chimney-stacks and cowl than mere brick and iron, and her great pleasure was to sit gazing out upon the wilderness below, rendered at times half indistinct by wreaths of smoke and vapour, and to trace in the strange, fantastic forms, the beheld resemblances and beings who might, in some degree, answer to the state of mind she was in herself. This little room, bare, and uninviting, is being paced by her now with quick steps and hasty turns, which speak of pre-occupied thoughts and working

mind. She has been trying to settle with herself exactly in what light she regards the new state of affairs in which she finds herself placed. The baby-brother had received her warmest, fondest kifs, and her heart leapt towards it with all the yearnings of natural affection. No jealousy there, or petty feelings; her congratulations to her father had been as warm and sincere as could be imagined, and she could scarcely refrain from openly expressing the hope that he would allow her to share some small part of the love which he was ready to bestow upon his son. Would he regard her now with any greater affection, or would the child engross his every parental feeling? The subject was painful and perplexing, and she gladly turned from it to the contemplation of what the birth of an heir had done as regarded her more especially. She was no longer the great heiress she had been, and she repeated this truth to herself with a fervour and earnestness which left no doubt of the sincerity of her joy. She felt that a great burden had been removed, and that now she was at liberty. She was no longer an impediment and annoyance to her father, or an object for his scheming mind to build future plans upon. As for her friends, she felt too sure of them to feel a moment's doubt of how they would regard the loss of her fortune. Mrs. Aston, Leonard, her aunts had loved plain Margaret Philipson, and not the heiress—so that it would be only returning to her former state. So she pondered as she walked up and down her little room, and she could not but feel grateful at being unable to discover a single thought of envy and jealousy, regret for what she had lost, or distrust of the future. Of course this is very absurd and unnatural, my dear friends, male and female. We all know that riches are the only true source of happiness, and if there is something said in a certain oriental book, about it being “better to get wisdom than gold,” we are far too knowing in this nineteenth century than to heed such unbusiness-like remarks. But Margaret is a very silly young lady indeed, and has not learnt her £ s. d. at all well—what good can come of it, I don't know. But thus we must leave her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. WILDMAN AGAIN.

I HOPE the reader has not quite forgotten our old friend Mr. Wildman, the lawyer, to whom he was introduced one rainy night in Birmingham. We are about to pay him another visit, and see how he has progressed in the interval. If we want to see him, however, we must not go to the dingy house in the dull, dirty, back street, where first we beheld him at home. He has changed his residence to one more congenial to his tastes, and now is the occupant of a large old overhanging mediæval house, which somewhat stands back from the rest of the lane in which it is situated, a fit residence for an antiquarian. Its barge boards and overhanging eaves are elaborately carved and moulded, black with age, and contrasting well with the plaster of which the fabric of the house is constructed. Medallions with roughly executed heads, and figures representing various kings and queens are stamped about in various places, and just over the door is the date "1601," very conspicuous. Gables stick up fantastically at every point, some adorned with vanes and finials of iron, others by nature's finials, in the way of wall-flower and stone-crop, and the heavy frame-work of the nail-studded door has a couple of griffins in the spandrils, which look askance at all who desire entrance. The interior of the house answers to the expectations which the outside has raised. Push open the door, reader, enter, and you will find yourself in a small square hall, oak panelled to the height of six or seven feet, plaster above; the floor is flagged with rough stone, split and uneven with age, a pair of antlers all awry, a tattered oil

painting, and a bronze lamp which feebly glimmers in the darkness, do not tend to enliven the place. It is evident that no visitors are either expected or welcome, for there are no chairs visible in this dreary hall. On the right and left are two doors, the former leading to the kitchen, the latter to Mr. Wildman's sitting-room. He has found a room at last after his own heart. There is an old picture of an alchemist, I believe by Rembrandt, at least, it is quite Rembrandtesque in its light and shade, which represents a room such as this in its rich disorder and careless grouping. There the old-fashioned vaulted apartment is partly occupied by a glowing furnace, the mouth of which is the focus of light. Over it stoops the philosopher, gray both with age and thought, examining and testing his crucibles, retorts, and alembics. There is a vaporous steam and circling smoke which rises above him; books are strewn about, and all around lie various implements of the alchemical art. Such is the picture, very likely studied from some actual scene. Here vases and caskets, and such-like curiosities, take the place of retorts and crucibles, an open fire-place, with a few half-dead embers, answers to the furnace. Mr. Wildman, even in dressing-gown and slippers, is far less picturesque a personage than the hoary alchemist, and yet the whole scene forms an admirable nineteenth century transcript of the picture I have mentioned. The fire-light and lamp-light—an old bronze lamp again, such as Aladdin might have possessed—feebly glimmer, and send out occasional flashes which seem to penetrate to the farthest corner, and then leave it again in its old obscurity. China and glass eagerly catch the faint reflections and flame into momentary life, and then silently die out. It is a passion of Wildman's, this sitting in the half light of the room, and one which suits his singular nature well. Perhaps he likes to meditate over the past—for to such a man there is no future—and recal what he was and what he might have been. Perhaps he wanders back to the time when he was a child and had not plunged into the whirlpool of life, but stood with doubtful gaze upon its bank. Some spirits will only appear at such times and under such conditions as these. What, then,

are the spirits which Wildman evokes from the half security of the room? Perhaps it is a hideous likeness of himself which appears to commune with him; perhaps the gentle shades of parents, and friends, if ever he had any, close round him, and try to raise up that grim soul within him. I think not. At all events, his thoughts cannot be very pleasant, for he rouses himself with an impatient shake and half-muttered exclamation, and, starting up, goes in search of his Froissart, after he has given the lamp permission to burn a little higher. It lies at the other end of the room, and in walking to fetch it, his eye falls upon an object he had almost forgotten in the hurry and confusion of moving—an old Japan bureau. A sudden thought strikes him. Froissart is still allowed to repose, and the bureau is dragged forward towards the fire-place. In five minutes afterwards he is seated in what is, by courtesy called, “an easy-chair,” and the lamp is trimmed and placed behind, so as to throw all its light upon the piece of furniture he is about to examine. It is not very large, or in any way remarkable—black, adorned with queer figures of dragons, and birds, and fish, and impossible men executed in gilding, though in parts the gold has rubbed off, and shows the vermillion foundation. There are four drawers below, each of which is in turn taken out, shaken, dusted, and replaced, after a careful examination of the back to see if there may be anything fallen down behind. The drawers having been finished, Wildman proceeds to the upper part, which is to him the cream of the affair. First the sliders are pulled out to their full length, then the sloping lid is slowly unlocked, and allowed to rest upon them. The interior, with all its charms, now lies revealed, and merits some little description. It is divided into three tiers, the lower consisting of four long drawers; the next of eight smaller, each occupying just half the space; above these again, is a range of nine pigeon-holes, one large and central, with four smaller on each side. The divisions between them bear in front a fluted pilaster ornamented with gilding. Each drawer, too, is ornamented, and is opened by a hanging brass handle. The first thing is to take out each

drawer in succession, dust it, and found the partitions between them. They all ring true, and give no signs of any concealed hiding-places. With a gentle sigh they are replaced, and the lawyer now turns his attention to the pigeon-holes. His practised eye quickly detects the fact that the partitions are of unusual thickness, and a sharp pull at the fluted pilasters at once reveals the space between each to be hollow. A little ivory rule is applied to each, but in vain; nothing appears to be concealed, and Wildman turns from his acquisition with a feeling amounting to disgust. He had fully reckoned upon some remarkable discovery, but now the bureau sinks to the level of a mere common-place piece of furniture. He places the lamp upon it impatiently, with a heavy hand, and rises, intending to renew the fire, which has nearly died out. What is his surprise when the lamp suddenly falls forward and goes out, its last expiring flicker serving to show that the whole front of the bureau, moved by some hidden spring, had advanced some inches, plainly revealing a space between it and the back. In a few minutes his trembling hand had relighted his lamp, and he turns eagerly towards the once despised bureau. It is as he suspected. He had placed the lamp upon a small spot of mother-of-pearl which concealed the spring, and so had set in motion the machinery. There was a space of about an inch in the thickness of the boards which formed the back, marked in front by the range of pigeon-holes and drawers I have described. This was now open, and within reposed a large sheet of paper folded some three or four times in thickness, so as to completely occupy the space, and deaden the sound when the exterior was touched. Carefully adjusting his spectacles, he removed it, and after a slight shake to remove the dust, proceeded to read it. It is simply the will of one Reuben Mercer, of Kidderminster, former owner of this bureau, in which he contradicts and annuls all former wills and bequests, and bequeaths the sum of eighty thousand pounds in the public funds, together with the lands and estate of Stoke Damerel, near Bridgewater, and certain house property in the cities of Manchester, Liverpool, and Huddersfield, bringing in an



annual income of nearly twenty thousand pounds, to Cyril Keightley his nephew, with whose conduct and marriage he now, after due consideration, confesses himself pleased and satisfied, and whose forgiveness he asks for any wrong he has done him. Mr. Wildman is too much of a lawyer to be surprised at this remarkable discovery. He knew mankind in general and Mr. Mercer in particular, too well to look upon this as a final will with any certainty, and mentally dismisses it as one of the many alterations which that old man had made at various periods of his life. He examines the date, which is exactly three years past, though from that he can augur very little, as the old man had died only eighteen months ago, and consequently may have had opportunity to make many other wills and codicils. He examines the witnesses names; they are both those of old servants of Mr. Mercer's, one of whom he knows to be dead, and the other parlayed and almost idiotic. Clearly, then, nothing can be made out in that direction; nevertheless he resolves to make certain inquiries relative to the will, which has so strangely come into his possession, and it is accordingly folded up carefully and deposited in his pocket-book. It so happened that a few days after this, business caused Mr. Wildman to go up to London for a short time. His first leisure hour was given to a pilgrimage to Doctors' Commons, where he was soon shown what purported to be the last will and testament of Reuben Mercer. He quickly produces that in his possession, and begins a rigid comparison of the two documents. In a moment the blood rushes up to his usually pale face, and his eyes glitter with a strange and evil expression. The will which he holds in his hand and which the bureau had so strangely placed in his possession, is not only posterior to the recognised document some sixteen months, being made about two months before the old man's death, but is written upon paper bearing a later paper mark, thus putting the probability of forgery out of the question. The witnesses in both cases are the same, though the bequests widely differ, the earlier one disinheriting his nephew Cyril Keightley, for a certain match he had contracted against his uncle's consent, and

having all his wealth in land, houses, and funded property, to a distant connection of his whom he had never seen. It was evident that the old man's precaution of hiding his will and his unfortunate choice of witnesses, had only served to frustrate his purpose and convey his bequest to the wrong person, thus defrauding the proper heir. Before leaving Doctors' Commons, Mr. Wildman made a few inquiries relative to the position occupied by the present legatee, and then turned his steps to the Temple Gardens, there to cogitate in quiet, certain thoughts which began to rage within his brain. In quiet, but not in peace. His thoughts were not of peace, being fixed upon the subject of his late discovery and the results it might have as regards him. He saw clearly, that he alone was the possessor of a mighty secret, of which he had the absolute disposal and control. It was in his hands to thrust down from his present position of wealth and power the wrong heir, and in his place set up the rightful legatee, raising him in all probability from a state of poverty and want. Now, remember, reader, I am not trying to depict a stage villain, or to describe what would be the current of his thoughts in such a position. Wildman was not a villain, as the world deems villains, but simply this, a cold, unfeeling, hard, selfish man, without one ray of religion to lighten, or of love to soften him, or turn his thoughts to anything but himself. He conceived himself hardly treated by the world, and therefore imagined that he owed it no duties. He found men calculating, and cold, and selfish, and he did not see why he should not be so too. So his thoughts ran in some such fashion as follows :—

“This discovery gives me what I have long wanted—power. It may bring me more also. How, now, does the case stand? I am the master of a secret, which I can reveal or not as I please. What do I gain either way? If I act as the world calls honestly, and reinstate Mr. Keightley—trusting the other man—what follows? I have made an enemy and have not gained a friend, and shall get for my reward, a few polite words and phrases, indeed, very probably not these, but shall be looked upon simply as having

done my duty. What is duty, and to whom do I owe it? certainly not to Mr. Keightley, whom I never saw. It is perfectly indifferent to me which man has it, as I cannot have it myself. But then justice? Absurd. What has a lawyer to do with justice, save in court? I am now a private man, a laic, and as such, I have found this out. I can, therefore, be under no obligation to justice, if there be any such abstraction, because it is a matter for my private judgment to decide. A priest would say it was a matter of conscience. What is conscience? A good man commits some trivial offence, and his conscience renders him miserable and convicts him; a wicked man commits some heinous crime, and yet *his* conscience lets him go scot free. Pooh! it is no safe guide, and I need not therefore trouble about it. Well, then, if I owe no duty to either man, or what is called conscience, what is to influence me in my decision? Self-interest clearly, for nothing else is left that I acknowledge. Now, to *me* it is of importance. I am miserably poor—my profession, which ought to support me, scarce gives me bread—my own means are slender, and not enough to enable me to gratify my tastes which are, I am sure, sufficiently simple and inoffensive. Now, this man who is in possession would, I have no doubt (if he be wise), pay me any moderate sum I required to suppress this will, and keep him in what he now enjoys. This, which would be trifling to him, would be comfort, luxury, to me—would place me in a position of independence upon my profession for which I have longed, and, at the same time, where would be the harm? Not to justice certainly, for it is immaterial to her as long as law is satisfied, and some one an inheritor—not to Keightley, for he is in ignorance of what he is deprived; and as for myself, how can it concern me which legatee benefits by old Mercer's indecision and vacillation? No, I can see no possible objection to such a course. I who need it most, should be benefited—no one would be the loser; and, after all, it would only be the same as if I had never discovered this piece of paper. After the toil of years in my profession, I should indeed be a fool to reject the first piece of power and advantage which it has placed in my hands. I will speak to

this man, and make him agree to my terms." He spoke these words almost aloud in a tone of fierce determination, and after a few turns more among those pleasant gardens, he departed under the gateway, fully bent upon carrying his design into execution. Wildman did not believe in spirits of any kind or degree; in fact, he really did not trouble himself about them, and yet, nevertheless, had his eyes been opened to pierce the veil of mist and haze around, he would have been startled to see the fierce spirit encounter, which then was raging in those placid Temple Gardens. His guardian and a certain grim, unshapely fiend, who may even now some day startle him in his dreams, were assuredly wrestling together for that wretched bit of mortality who was there, and then so quietly disposing of duty, and conscience, and obligation. A few minutes and it will be too late, for the fiend is pressing, and his weapons sharp from much use. But not one good thought, nor one confession of frailty comes from the mortal's heart. No, his mind is made up—he has reflected, and will go his own way—he has reason on his side, and he will act according to it. So the good angel mournfully departs, and the mocking evil shadow takes his place at the lawyer's right hand to prosper his undertakings. The battle was over, the man and his shadow departs and proceed to the execution of the plans which his brain has conceived. Perhaps that very moment was the fateful turning point of Wildman's life. The opportunity for return had been given, rejected, and henceforth he was allowed to choose his own path and walk therein. Retribution is often worked out by evil men who are its unconscious ministers, and carry out the purposes of the avenger while they think only of compassing their own.

Two days after the scene in the Temple Gardens, Mr. Wildman stood before No. 27, Eaton Square.

CHAPTER XXV.

TEMPTATION.

MR. PHILIPSON was seated in his library chair, reading the report of one of his speeches in the "*Times*." A servant enters, "A gentleman to see you on business, sir."

"What name?"

"He will not give his name, but says it is immediate business."

"Very well; show him in," and Mr. Philipson lays the paper aside with a gentle sigh. In a moment the stranger enters, no stranger to us, reader, for we recognise Mr. Wildman. Mr. Philipson supposing him to have come on parliamentary business, is suave—young members of the House always are. He bows and motions Mr. Wildman to a seat, intimating gently, that he has not the pleasure of knowing his name.

"My name, sir, is Wildman, and I am an attorney," remarks that personage, who looks rather more determined and bloodless than usual.

"Ah, quite so," is the rejoinder. "And you have come, no doubt, on parliamentary business?"

"My business, sir, is nothing connected with parliament."

"Indeed, pardon my mistake; perhaps you would be good enough to state what it may be?"

"My business is something relating, and very nearly too, to your own concerns, Mr. Philipson. You must excuse me if I seem impertinent in addressing certain questions to you, or if I show a somewhat intimate acquaintance with your affairs."

"I can only suppose, sir," replies Mr. Philipson, with

some dignity, "that your questions are warranted by actual necessity. Response to them you must be aware is at my option."

"Of course; but for my part, I think you will accede to my requests. I am not one to trouble myself with other person's concerns for trivial reasons. Now, sir, attend," he fixes his stony gray, green eyes upon Philipson with a cold piercing look, which somewhat disturbs that gentleman, although not wont to be alarmed. But there is an impenetrable air, a search defying air, about his antagonist; for such he almost begins to regard him, to which he is unaccustomed. He looks the kind of man to make, when thoroughly roused, a deadly, unflinching resolution, and to keep it constantly in mind, day after day, night by night, for years and years, until the time for execution came, when he would carry it out in a remorseless, determined way, which should conquer all resistance. Doubtless imagination creates some of this, though Edward Philipson was not in the habit of giving way to it; but, nevertheless, he could not help feeling, as he watched that bloodless lawyer, alternately stroking his cleanly shaven chin, and pressing the tips of his lean fingers together, as though his pleasant easy chair had suddenly been converted into some evil instrument of torture and unrest, and the figure seated opposite were his inquisitor.

"Now attend, sir, if you please. I believe you inherited, under the will of the late Reuben Mercer, a distant relative of yours, certain sums of money invested in the funds, sundry house property situate in Manchester, Liverpool, and Huddersfield, besides a certain estate commonly called the Stoke Damerel Estate. May I ask whether my surmise is correct or no?"

"You are perfectly correct in what you affirm, Mr. Wildman, though I do not suppose that it takes much penetration to discover that. A few shillings, and a few hours search at Doctor's Commons would easily make you master of that." Mr. Philipson hopes to conceal his real fear with assumed touchiness. The lawyer is impenetrable.

"It may be so, or it may not. Now, sir, may I ask what was the date of the will under which you inherited?"

Though a question, it founded more like a command, and Mr. Philipson hesitated in his compliance.

"May I inquire whether you are acting for any one who contests my claim? You must be aware that your inquiries are of the nature of leading questions."

"Our business, Mr. Philipson, will best be settled out of a court of justice, unless *you* wish to transfer it thither, which I doubt. I should counsel you to frankly answer my questions."

"Well, sir, in that case I can easily tell, on reference to my memoranda." He looked for a minute, and then answered, "The date was July 6, 184—."

A curious smile stole over the lawyer's face.

"Quite as I thought. Mr. Philipson, it is my duty to prepare you for unpleasant tidings. A will of later date has been discovered, in which this bequest to you is cancelled, and the whole of Mr. Mercer's property left to a nephew of his, a certain Cyril Keightley. This will is known to me only, and is in my possession."

Reader, Philipson is a bad man, cruel, selfish man, but I think we may feel a brief moment's pity for him, even though most undeserved. It was as if an avalanche had entirely rolled away the ground under his feet, and left him alone surrounded by ruins. No great trouble, no intense sudden blow, is fully felt at the first shock. It takes some little space of time before the many strands which form its web are entirely and thoroughly grasped and taken by the mind. That is why persons often seem unfeeling, when any fearful intelligence of death or calamity is brought before them. We cannot judge from the first fixed rigidity of feature, or dull stolidity of manner, what the heart is feeling. The truth is, just then it *cannot* feel, but gropes about in a dark, hazy mist, as did the Egyptians in their thick darkness, from which they waked not but to the death of their first-born. See the same person some hours, or perhaps days after, when each detail of his misery has come upon him and been duly pondered—see him then, as he wrestles, and prays in half unutterable words of despairing anguish, and you will no longer think him dull of perception or blunt of feeling. So it was with Philipson.

The news that he might be deprived legally of that wealth he so highly valued—that a single word might strip him of all, and reduce him to the old dead level of mediocrity—all this fell, indeed, upon his outward ear, but did not, could not, penetrate the heart at once. He sank back in his chair, and continued to gaze with speechless, stony look upon Wildman, who, on his part, never removed his eyes from off his victim. There was dead silence for a few minutes, and then endeavouring by great exertion to recover his energies and collect all his powers for the contest and struggle which he knew must come, Philipson began, but in strangely weak and uncertain tones, “You would scarcely, I should think, make such an assertion without due evidence to support it; nor can you expect me quietly to resign my rights—yes, my rights—without sufficient proofs to my mind of its satisfactory character.”

Wildman was a little disappointed in Philipson's tone. He had expected anger, noisy defiance and contest, but this calm, deliberate manner of proceeding, he was not prepared for. “Of course,” he replied, “you shall be fully satisfied. Fortunately it is in my power to do so at once. The will is now in my pocket-book,” and he put his hand to his breast-pocket as he spoke. Philipson looked firmly at, and measured his visitor. He was a tall, well built man, and one not likely tamely to give up the precious document without a struggle. No, violence would be of no avail, and might even do harm to his cause, should the lawyer really prove to be right. Wildman, in the meantime, had gauged his host's thoughts with tolerable accuracy, and, thinking it prudent to be on his guard, walked to the great central table, on which he deposited the fatal paper, retaining his hold upon it with one hand, and grasping, as if mechanically or accidentally, an open paper knife, furnished with a tolerably long and sharp steel blade. Under these precautions, he permitted Mr. Philipson to examine the will, each word of which seemed first to fear his eyes, and then drop like molten lead into the depth of his heart. He could not doubt or question its authenticity. The whole paper had far too genuine an aspect to be a forgery, and,

much as it was his interest to do so, he could not deny that cruel signature which deprived him of all he loved best, extinguished his hopes of enduring bliss, and dashed the cup of happiness away from his lips. He did not utter a word, but stood gazing with vacant looks alternately at his tormentor and the open document by which his heart had been so wrung. One blow has hurled from that great Babylon which he had built. All must be resigned, Margrove, London, Stoke Damerei—he must resign his seat—be no longer the great county man he had been—no longer be feted, caressed, and bowed down to. What was he? Plain Mr. Philipson, with a wretched pittance of eight hundred pounds, even if that were left him. What would the Edginton's say? What would Douglas say? What would the world say? And the son and heir, for whom he had so longed, to whom would he be son? To a beggar. What would he inherit? Misery. And the thought of how all his enemies, those who he knew sneered at and envied his rapid rise, though they pressed round and courted him; the thought of how all these rejoice and laugh, or still worse, pity and condole, was so intolerable as to wring forth a few ill concealed tears. Mr. Wildman watched all this, not with pleasure or cruel delight, but with a certain stony satisfaction, that all was going as he would have it. He did not care enough for his fellow-men even to be cruel to them, that is not actively so; but when he had set his mind upon a certain course of action, that was pursued by him regardless of what corpses he might drive over in the way. He waited quietly until he thought Philipson had had sufficient time to learn to its fullest extent his misfortune and its consequences, and then he began in cold measured tones, pausing at intervals to let his meaning sink in deeper. "You are shocked and very naturally so. I can see that you recognise the legality of my claim and what the consequences would be. It is so, I think!" He paused and looked inquiringly, as he slowly folded up the will and replaced it in his pocket-book. Philipson nodded assent. "But I cannot help thinking that you have rushed to a somewhat hasty conclusion. You think it necessary that this latter will should be enforced.

Pardon me. But I do not see the absolute necessity of this. I act upon my own responsibility, and as I have no client, you do not treat with me second-hand. Do you perceive?" At first Philipson had paid a dull and forced attention, but as this speech proceeded, he thought he saw a slight opening. Was it possible that the lawyer did not mean to act upon his knowledge. "I begin to see," he remarked, "although yet quite vague."

"I am the sole person with whom you have to deal, and I need not say that I hold your destinies in my hand. But really I do not see, I mean, as Mr. Keightley is not my client, I do not see that it is my interest to reveal what I have accidentally learnt. Were he my regular client, you must understand it would be different, widely so; it would then be my absolute duty, however unpleasant to reveal it. But why should it be so now? He is a person I do not know any more than I do you. It would suit me as well to save you as him; in fact, if you understand me properly, the business need never go out of our hands."

"My dear sir," begins Mr. Philipson, now beginning to see the drift, and ready to catch at a straw, "of course I shall be ready to accede to any reasonable proposal."

"Excuse me, I propose nothing, I suggest nothing. I only wish to know your opinion upon the subject. As the case stands, it is thus: chance has put in my hands the power of depriving you of what you now hold, and transferring it to another, and in this the law will support me. Now here are two absolute strangers brought before me, one of whom I have the means of benefiting. I, for my part, do not see, as the law has already made an award and so declared herself satisfied, how I should be wronging the ends of justice by still keeping this deed in my own possession. It would simply be retaining an already existing state of things according to law, for private concerns are quite out of our ken. With them I profess to have nothing to do. I wrong no one, for I cannot deprive a man of that which the law declares he has not. Do you see? Well, then, what is to guide me in my decision and line of conduct?"

"My dear Mr. Wildman, I quite follow your line of

argument, which is characterized by the acuteness and clearness which I might have expected from you. As you say, the law has declared itself satisfied with my claims—it has made its award—why disturb it? By so doing, you would only ruin an innocent man who has done you no wrong; nay, more, who only waits an opportunity of doing you good. Now let me be candid. You have it in your power to do me a great service. Will you let me name any sum which may compensate for the trouble it may give you?”

“Pardon me, my dear sir, I think you confuse matters. You speak of services rendered and compensation to come. Of this matter I know nothing at all, nor do I wish. I, on my part, can only say that I am a man desirous of retiring from the active part of my profession, and solicitous of that ease and quiet which my time of life renders almost necessary. Now the management of a gentleman’s estate and private concerns is what I could very well undertake, and would be a business admirably well suited to my inclination and position. This would, of course, include the entire control and superintendence of all deeds, papers, and legal instruments of any kind relating to his estates. Now, tell me, among your acquaintance, parliamentary and otherwise, do you know any one in want of such an agent?”

“My dear sir, your speech could not be more opportune, for you recollect to me a want long felt by me, and one which I have in vain tried to supply. In my notions of such a place, a man would be needful of clear good judgment and sound discretion—one who should be able to know what to withhold and what to produce—one, in short, who would enter upon one’s private concerns with the zeal and activity of a friend. Now, tell me candidly, is there any objection on your part, to your undertaking this? I feel I could trust myself in your hands entirely, nor could I desire to be in better. The stipend which I should ordinarily attach to such a confidential post would be five hundred, in your case would one thousand be sufficient?”

“I like both your proposition and your terms,” remarked Wildman with great composure, “nor do I think under

all circumstances, could you do better than to make me what you propose."

"Let us consider it settled, my dear Wildman, and allow me to anticipate your first year's income." So saying, Philipson handed his master, for such we may term him, a check for the amount of one thousand pounds, which the other pocketed without surprise, pleasure, or more acknowledgment than a quiet "Thank you," and then added, "It is of course a mere matter of form between friends and men of honour, but I for my part promise you, as your confidential agent, never to reveal any particulars relative to your estates, money, or other private matters, which you may have any reason for wishing to keep secret. Does this suffice you?"

"Perfectly, perfectly, my dear sir, and for my part, you know the income I have stipulated and attached to your office, which will continue so long as you retain that position. I may trust you fully?"

"Entirely," was the answer; and these two men looked at each other with that anxious expression, to be seen sometimes in the faces of dogs when at play, waiting for each to spring first. Only there was this little difference. This was no play, but a somewhat serious business, in which a false move or hasty word might ruin and crush. After a pause, in which each waited for the other to speak first, when each saw that openness was not to be expected, they mutually resolved to leave matters on the tacit feeling of unwilling but necessary trust and reliance. And so these two men, each hating and despising the other, one positively desirous of the other's death, parted with a warm shake of the hand, which old friends might have envied and imitated. But as the door closed and the necessity of dissimulation ended, the mask he had compelled himself to wear, fell from Philipson's face, and in that ashen, wan face, bedabbled with cold death sweat, which he beheld reflected in the opposite mirror, he learnt that henceforth his food was to be the apples of sorrow and the juice of wormwood.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PROPOSAL.

FOR some days Mr. Philipson's existence was one of the most exquisite and refined torture. He was continually called upon to play a part, and act in a fearful satire upon himself. To be congratulated for pleasures not his own—to be consulted about the application of wealth which he knew too well he had no right to—to be addressed by titles of respect which might momentarily be taken from him, could anything surpass the agony of all this, when it had to be endured with a composed and smiling face? Yes, there was something worse even than that. To forget for a brief while, his sorrows and disappointments in sleep—to dream himself once more happy and prosperous, and then to wake to the chill, dead weight of reality which could not be shaken off, to take up his burden, heavily and sadly, and bear it with him through his daily march in the world, without the possibility of one word of comfort, consolation, or pity. There was no one whom he could take for a confidante, and, hateful as the secret was to him, so unutterably heavy did its load become when he felt the absolute necessity of its remaining pent up in his own breast, that he began to long even for that man, who, in reality was his master, if it were only for the chance of breaking the silence which bound him. It was a species of solitary confinement, where silence was imposed upon the only subject about which he could think or speak, only with this added misery, that he was compelled to take his usual part in the world, and go through all without flinching. Before Wildman, by a wonderful exertion of self-control, he had done so; and so perfectly had

he played the part of indifference as now to deceive him, and make him believe the blow less heavy than it really was. But when alone, there was no need of restraint upon his agonies of despair and occasional bursts of fury. Of course he knew that it was Wildman's interest not to betray him, but still he had not lived so long without learning what trifles will make men change or forego their interests, when there is no other tie imposed upon them. He might fancy that it would be more to his advantage to betray him to Keightley, and then what would follow but ruin and disgrace? Or again, he might—and what could prevent him—draw the web tighter and tighter around him, and press more and more in his demands for money, and so ruin him by inches. In whatever direction he looked, he could see nothing but a misty gloom which concealed the future, and doubled its horrors by the long and doubtful anticipations of them. So miserable was this uncertainty, that twice he had begun a letter to Keightley, to inform him of his rights and make formal resignation of them to him, but his courage failed him—the change of his fortunes was too great to be contemplated, and the pen fell from his hand. But this mental agony had done its work, and a few days had transformed him from a hale looking, handsome, middle-aged man, into a morose, broken shadow—broken in mind, in health, and hopes. Margaret saw but little of all this, for she was much with Edith, whose health was still weak; but that little was enough to fill her with dismay and apprehension of evil. She knew too well that her efforts to comfort and help her father would be in vain, and that it was useless to hope or expect that he would confide in her. He was the same hard, unrelenting parent he had ever been, and it seemed that the impenetrable barrier between them was never to be broken down or removed. So she went on sadly and wearily, pitying the griefs she saw but could not relieve, and praying that they might be averted.

It was at this juncture that Arthur Trevennen choose to decide his fate with Margaret. The poor boy, although perfectly free from vanity or unreasonable self-reliance,



could not refrain from some hopes of his success, in spite of the little encouragement he had of late received. Margaret's nature was too tender to treat him with any harshness, or to manifest her disapprobation of his suit in other than the most gentle manner; but she felt that his persevering devotion to her was not only bad, because hopeless to him, but also placed her in a false position, from which she found it difficult to escape. This, unfortunately, Arthur's infatuation rendered him blind to, and the receipt of a letter from his mother urging his return to Maffingbury, where his approaching election rendered his presence desirable, decides him to reveal his love to Margaret before he left.

Margaret was sitting with Edith when she was informed that Mr. Trevennen was in the drawing-room, and having an instinctive dread that some unpleasant scene was at hand, she descended somewhat unwillingly and with a trembling heart. Nor was Arthur in less real trepidation, though he tried manfully to conceal his anxiety by conversation upon various trifling topics. At length Margaret inquired when he returned to Maffingbury, and that word recalled him to his purpose.

"My mother has written to beg my return as soon as possible. I believe there is some talk of my being proposed for some little borough close by where I live, but I really take very little concern about it. You remember my old aversion to it?" added he, half inquiringly.

"Yes; but are not your opinions changed upon that point? You know it is some time since we discussed that."

"Indeed it is. The time has seemed very long since those happy days at Maffingbury. Miss Philipson," said he, with sudden energy, "I cannot go back again there before I have told you of one thing which has preyed upon my mind for months. I fear I shall seem very presumptuous, very daring, when I tell you what hopes I have allowed myself to form and cherish until they have become a part of my actual existence. Miss Philipson, I have loved you from the day I first saw you, then living with your aunts, now twelve months ago. This I have not breathed to any one, no, not even to my mother.

I resolved that I would give myself full time to test the sincerity and depth of my feelings, and I have done so. In this interval, I have had times of almost total solitude. I have also, as you know, mingled in the world and joined in all its pleasures. Neither of these extremes have had the slightest effect in changing the nature of my love for you, and I feel, truly, that it is a passion which can end only with my life. I am painfully aware how presumptuous I must appear in making this confession to you—I am well convinced that there is little in me to merit such love as you may have to bestow. I know my inferiority in all respects to you, and yet I cannot refrain from making you this sincere offer of all the most sincere affection of my heart. Will you, can you think of me in this light?"

His address, though nervous and somewhat hesitating, received a grace and eloquence from the sincere and heartfelt way in which it was delivered, that touched Margaret's heart. She could not look unmoved upon the young man, pleading his suit so earnestly, and she paused a moment before giving that answer which she knew was to dash his hopes. When she began, her clear tones trembled a little as she said, "Mr. Trevennen, you have paid me the greatest honour that a man can do to any woman, and I have the most unpleasant duty to perform that I can conceive possible. I would it were in my power to answer you as you wish and deserve, or to do more than assure you of my best wishes for you. But it is not. I must answer you truthfully, however unpleasant that truth may be. Mr. Trevennen, I cannot be your wife, and I wish for your sake that you had fixed your affections on a worthier object, or one in whose power it might be to repay them. Pardon me if I have told you this at all bluntly—I only desire to be candid."

She had risen as she said these words, and Arthur's eye was fixed upon her dignified, elegant figure, as she spoke the words which, to him, were utter despair. He thought she had never looked so beautiful or noble.

"Can you give me no hope, Margaret?" was his only remark.

"It would not be right in me to do so. I know my own

mind, and cannot see any chance of an alteration of the feelings of regard with which I now view you, into anything more approaching what you desire. I am very truly sorry to disappoint you, and for your sake, regret that we should ever have met. Take courage, Mr. Trevennen; I believe time and reflection will do much for you, and from my heart I hope it. As a friend, I shall be pleased to see you when you feel ready to meet me in that capacity alone. Till then, perhaps, it will be best if we see less of each other." She extended her hand, in token of adieu, which Arthur took almost unconsciously.

"I must say good-bye to all my fondest hopes, then. Well, I will not say one word to try to move you: but resigned I cannot say I am. I am paying the penalty of giving way to my imagination, and of listening to the voice of my foolish vanity. Good-bye, Miss Philipson, I hope you may be very happy and never know the misery I now feel."

He passed from her like a shadow, and had left the room almost before she knew it. He seemed stunned as it were, overpowered and struck down by the heavy and unexpected blow which had fallen upon him. At that moment Margaret felt all the pain which must ever be to a generous mind, on having unwillingly made others sad. Though she knew that she could not have acted otherwise with truth or honor, yet she almost reproached herself as the cause of his wretchedness; and it was not until she had mentally reviewed and weighed every word she had uttered in their brief interview, that she was able to acquit herself. Meanwhile the stricken deer has repaired to the shades of Massingbury.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MOTHER AND SON.

AN intensely hot morning. Thermometer at eighty-five degrees in the shade, and something dreadful to think of in the sun. The great elms at Maffingbury just feebly wave and tofs their arms and let in tempting glimpses of the lake down below. The grooms can be heard hissing and clucking to the horses they are cleaning, and every now and then one hears some dog bark. But that is all, everything else is quiet. Mrs. Trevennen dressed in the coolest and airiest of muslins, peeps out of the morning room, darkened and shaded to the utmost possible degree. Arthur Trevennen is leaning over the balustrade of the terrace, looking downwards and occasionally tearing off a piece of lichen or kicking a stone. What a listless, lifeless attitude, and how weary he looks! Apparently Mrs. Trevennen thinks so too, for she calls to him, "Arthur, my dear boy, what are you dreaming of? Do you know the heat is scorching, and you right out in the sun! Do come in at once, there's a good child; I want to speak to you."

"Yes, mother." He breaks off and casts away one more piece of lichen, as if his life depended upon it, then with slow and nerveless step, enters the house by one of the French windows.

"How horribly idle you look, my dear. Here, come and sit down in this easy chair." Mrs. Trevennen resumes her own seat with its back to the window. Arthur sits so as to face her.

"I want to speak to you about your election. You know it has long been settled you shall stand for the county,

and I have looked up all those who can be of most use to you. It is now your turn to do what you can ! ”

“ Thank you, mother.”

“ Sir Edward cannot last very long, and I think we may expect a vacancy soon. There was some report, I believe, of Charles Coleyer’s intending to stand, but I really think it absolutely incredible. I cannot believe it for a moment. No, I think you are quite safe. Our interest must carry the day.” Meanwhile, Arthur has taken up a Seores cup of Rosé du Barry china, which he is twirling about between two fingers, as if very particularly desirous of breaking it in a new and ingenious way.

“ Take care of that cup, my dear, it was a present from the Duc d’Aumale to your father, and I would not have it broken for anything. Well, now, I think it would be as well for us to give some large crush kind of parties to the general mob of people, and a few little dinners to the more select.”

“ Very well, mother.”

“ I wish you would take more interest in it, my dear ; it is not very heartening to me if you don’t assist.”

“ I beg your pardon, mother, I really am very absent. To be sure I think your plans would do admirably,” and the unhappy Seores cup received a fresh tofs.

“ Very well, dear. Now listen to what I propose. We can give a grand evening affair—light up the grove, and have fire-works and all that sort of thing, and then the mob can dance on the lawn (for in the house they shall not), and then with some music and singing it would do very well.”

“ Very well, indeed, my dear mother. And who is to come ? Give me that piece of paper and a pen, and I will write them all down.”

“ Now then, begin, Arthur. We will have the Astons—mother and son—he has several votes. Have you put them down ? Very well. Now, the Evans, and Turnbills, and O’Galls, that fearful Irish giant, O’Gall, who says, ‘ yes, mim,’ and ‘ no, mim,’ to every one ; but, oh ! how I wish we could have Margaret Philipson.”

Hallo ! down goes the Rosé du Barry cup at last. Its fate is run, and it now lies shattered on the hearthrug.

"Oh, my cup, my cup! Arthur how *could* you? Really you expect one to be 'mistress of oneself though China fall.'"

"My dear mother, I am very sorry I am sure. Let me pick them up."

What a weak, feeble voice and manner!

"Why, Arthur, what is the matter? Your voice trembles—you are as white as death—my dear child, you are going to faint! Surely this stupid cup has not upset you?"

"Oh no, mother. I shall be better presently—I'm not well."

"I have seen for some time you are not well, indeed, my boy. But tell me what is the matter. You are not troubling about the election, are you?"

"No, indeed. Oh, it really is nothing. There, I feel quite well again now."

"Arthur, don't you know we have never had any secrets from one another since you have been a boy. Don't you remember how I used to come into your room the last thing every night, and you would lean on me, and tell me all your little joys and sorrows of the day? Surely, my dear child, it is very late for us to begin and learn concealment. You can have no truer or better friend than your mother, believe me, Arthur. There are only we two, and why should there be any mistrust between us."

"My dear, kind mother, I would tell you in a minute, were it anything you could help or relieve. But indeed it is something you cannot assist me in."

"What is there Arthur, in which a parent cannot assist a child? Try me, my dear; I know you too well to think you would ask me to help you in anything safe."

"No indeed, mother: to love is nothing disgraceful."

"To love! You, Arthur? You jest, and on a subject I do not like."

"Do I look as if I were jesting?"

Indeed he did not. Pale, haggard, and worn, he certainly did not resemble the Arthur Trevennen of some days back—so full of health, and vigour, and spirit, and his mother gazed in silent wonder.

"Tell me again, my dear boy. Did I really understand

you rightly? Are you really in love? Come tell me now, what cause is there for these miserable tones and looks. Who is the object of your affections?"

A dead pause, and then in a broken tone, "Margaret Philipson."

Had a hot coal touched Mrs. Trevennen, she could not have been startled more. As the words passed his lips, she rose in an instant from her seat, cold, stern, resolved; and as if by galvanism, in like manner rose Arthur, and mother and son confronted each other.

Mother and son! How alike they were at that moment. Mother firm and determined, proud and resolute; son, fierce in his grief, and inflexible. They met on equal ground. Mrs. Trevennen speaks first in cold, stern tones, "And do you mean to say, Arthur, that you love this girl?"

"I have loved her from the first hour I saw her, a year ago. I love her better than myself, than all the world. Yes I tell you, I *do* love her!" He speaks sternly in his desperation.

"Grateful boy, go on and finish your speech; you mean that you love her better than your mother. Fool that I was," said she, striking her hand with violence upon the table, while every feature of her face glowed with unnatural excitement. "Fool that I was to expose you to this! But how could I have believed—was it for a moment conceivable that you would fall into it? Arthur, you will drive me wild with your folly."

There is no answer from her son, who stands moodily trifling with the fragments of the cup.

"Speak, for heaven's sake, and tell me how long this folly has gone on."

"I told you, mother, that I loved her from the hour when first I saw her."

"Of course—what folly. I did not mean that. Does she know it? Have you published abroad your frantic madness?"

"I have told Miss Philipson that I love her."

"Better and better. What next will you have to say? And she—how did she respond?"

"She refused me."

"What! what do you say? That girl refuse a Trevennen? You are mad—you cannot think of what you say. I tell you it is impossible."

"Mother, there are higher distinctions than being a Trevennen or Pendragon. I think goodness, purity, and virtue, higher than these, and Margaret possessed them all. Yes, mother, she was immeasurably above me—my superior in all respects, save that worldly distinction of birth. I never felt how poor a creature I was, with my birth, and riches, and education, and position, until I saw her. But she refused me, and I love her better than ever. Oh, mother, I am, indeed, very unhappy," and the poor boy puts his head on the table, and sheds honest tears without concealment.

Cry on, Arthur, those are no tears to be ashamed of; nay, they are an honor and an ornament to you, as having a heart from which love, affection, and respect have not been driven. I would rather see you thus with your cheeks wet with these honorable drops, than behold you a well-dressed loiterer at the Carlton or Reform, even though a Duke should be on your right hand, and an Earl place his arm within yours. It is not in the mother's nature to neglect her child's tears. Inflexible and resolute she is, but not pitiless.

"My poor boy," she says, and strokes his hair with that glittering jewelled hand, as though once more he was the child she had nursed on her bosom. The word was enough, mother and son are in each other's arms, and for a minute pride is stilled. "Now tell me, dearest, how all this has come about, and let us talk about it."

"I have loved her weeks and months and said nothing, but have gone on quietly and tried, outwardly, to be the same. You cannot tell how lovely and good she is, mother; it is no idle passing fancy of mine, it is not, indeed. I have watched her in all times, alone and with others, and she is always the same. You know I have seen her not only in the country here, last year, when all was quiet and dull, but in London as well, where she was so talked about, and admired in society."

"And how long has she known your love, Arthur?"

"I never said a word until the other day when I heard of the birth of a son to her father. You know I was then in London with her. I did not mean to speak, but I could not help it any longer, and I asked her to be my wife."

"And she?"

"She told me, I do not know in what terms, for she was evidently surprised, and I was agitated—but she said that she had not any idea of this, that it would have been far better had we never met—that she esteemed me as a friend and as your son, but could not love me as a husband. And so we parted."

"Arthur, I can say nothing to you in blame of this, for I feel that the fault has been mine. I should have known better than to bring you into contact so much last year. But this never seemed possible to me. I never imagined it for a instant. I looked upon her only as a lady-like, nice girl, hardly treated by her father, from all accounts, and above all, the daughter of my early friend. I thought you esteemed her similarly. Oh, how blind, how fatally blind I have been!"

It seemed as if Arthur's confession had, in a moment, removed a veil from her eyes, which before had prevented her seeing clearly. How was it that she had all this time mistaken all Arthur's readiness and desire of Margaret's society—those constant practisings and rehearsals—those frequent walks he was always planning, and above all, his listlessness and indifference when she was away? And she had all this time made sure of him for Lady Constance! and had imagined that he must have forgotten Margaret. How nearly all her schemes had ended in utter failure! It was almost too much to think of, and yet even at that moment she was obliged to confess to herself, that at no time had she seen Margaret give the least encouragement, or show any signs of coquetry. No. She certainly had behaved well—but oh! would that she had never seen him.

"My dear boy," she began again, "no one can pity you more sincerely and entirely than I do. I cannot say that I should ever have sanctioned so unequal and undesirable a match, or have looked upon it with any other feelings than those of aversion and dislike. You know I had other views for you;

nevertheless, as this has happened—mainly, as I will allow, through my folly—we need not again refer to so painful a subject, especially as the result is not one to require my interference. This is, as I firmly believe, but a first boyish love—very natural at your age, and highly to be respected. I can and do sympathise with you sincerely. Nevertheless, I am sure time and change of scene will do much to alleviate your grief and alter your feeling; nor shall any efforts of mine be wanting to that end. I do not bid you not to grieve, my dear boy, for that I know, is impossible; but try and not give way too much. In a few days we will go abroad, and there endeavour to forget the sorrows we have met with here. You cannot see, you cannot, I am sure, wish to see Miss Philipson again; and I know this will be best for all parties.”

With a soft, motherly kiss, and pressure of the hand, she left him and retired to her own apartment. Once there, however, she was able to give way to the mingled storm of wounded pride and angry passion that raged within. Long did she sit battling with hot tears that *would* come, and nature that *would* be human, till at length the clouds cleared off, the storm abated, and she was the same calm, cold, proud Mrs. Trevennen as ever. She wrote several letters that morning, and one was directed to the Marchioness of Downshire.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LEONARD AND MARGARET.

To a person in really strong, good health, I can scarcely imagine any season of the year more invigorating both to body and mind, than the clear, early mornings of October. Just then nature puts out her powers to their fullest extent, before the chill and frost of the winter comes to conceal much of her working, and rob her of the greater part of her color. Autumn is essentially the time of color, not but that the other seasons have their charms in this respect, and that in her floral productions, summer may excel; but still the orange-reds, and scarlets, and gold, and purple lights, are never to be seen in such full beauty as they are about September and October. The early part of the morning, too, is lovely. No one who knows the country well, believes in those gray clinging mists and colorless skies which are so common: he knows that a few hours later the sun will come and chase those shadows away, and flood the whole vault of heaven with a sea of gold cloud, flecked with various iris hues. Just then, too, the paly gray smoke from the "squitch" or furze, strikes most pleasantly on the senses—there is a fresh, clean, wholesome smell about it which is most invigorating and appetising, too, if it be felt at early morn before breakfast. Such, at least, were Leonard's thoughts as he paced up and down in front of the house, and watched the mist clearing off the moat and the opal lights of the sky. The breakfast hour at Gaunt House was eight, Mrs. Aston sturdily refusing any yielding to her increasing years; and as Leonard, on his return from the rounds, found his mother not yet down, he employed his leisure time in gathering a handful of flowers for her little

table. There was a good choice, in spite of the lateness of the season, and he managed to make a fine bouquet of china-asters, verbenas, and roses, before a warning tap at the window summoned him into the morning meal. He placed them beside her, and sat down almost in silence, not a gloomy silence, though, by any means, for smiles kept chasing each other over his face, like the cloud shadows over a lofty hill. At length his mother began—

“Leonard, you have something to say—I see it plainly.”

“And, like a spirit, I must be addressed first. Mother, the seal is removed from the leaden vessel in which Solymán confined me—the smoke clears away, and the genie is at liberty to stretch himself, which he has done.”

“All very fine, my dear son, but as I am not a genie, I should like to have that speech interpreted.”

“You know, or at least guess what I mean, I am sure. Well, then, let me tell you plainly. You remember the terms of my agreement—I was to wait until an heir should be born to Margrove. I have waited. It is born, you have long known; and now I have written.”

“I wish you joy, I wish you all success, my boy. But why did you write? Why not see Margaret herself?”

“For many reasons. Think how much I must have to explain, and how much better such things are explained where one can deliberate and calmly choose the exact word which shall express what you mean and no more, than in an interview necessarily very exciting to both parties, where, after all, the very pith of what you mean may be forgotten or unobserved. No, it was best to write.”

“Perhaps you are right in that. I shall burn for to-morrow’s post, to see what it will bring. Not that I doubt; of the result I feel sure, and thus congratulate you by anticipation,” and she fondly kissed the not unwilling Leonard.

We have, however, a power denied to Leonard, and instead of waiting until to-morrow’s post, can instantly see the letter itself, and the effect it produced upon its receiver.

When the servant had brought in the letters at breakfast time, and Mr. Philipson had tossed his daughter’s to her across the table, she had not recognised the handwriting,

but had, nevertheless, placed it aside until a convenient opportunity came for reading it in quiet. This certainly would not be until after breakfast, for she soon saw that her father was in one of his worst moods. To this his correspondence seemed to have moved him, for after reading one of his letters with a running commentary of execrations, he hurled it in the fire and remained fierce and untractable for the rest of the meal. After in vain having tried to appease and quiet him, Margaret took advantage of the first opportunity of retiring from the table, and, after locking the door of the little retreat I have mentioned, sat down to the perusal of the letter which had so excited her curiosity. It bore the Marbury post mark, and was dated Gaunt House, which fact, in conjunction with the manly hand she now recognised for Leonard's, was enough to bring the blood up into her cheeks. The letter ran thus :—"I cannot formally address you, for fear my language should seem either too stiff or too presumptuous. My heart is so full of intense thoughts which burn to find a vent, that I care not to tarry on the threshold of mere conventionalities. Margaret (pardon me this word), do you know my thoughts? Do you guess the pith of this letter from its commencement—nay, from the fact of its coming at all? I think you do. It may be foolish or more in me, but I like to picture to myself the bright, warm flush which I know will mantle on your face when you open this, which will deepen as you read it. As I write each word, I say to myself, 'Margaret is to see this,' and I go on with a half scornful impatience at the inefficiency of pen and ink, to utter the winged words I have to say. Margaret, after a year's silence on what was nearest my heart—after twelve months spent in teaching my senses to deny their use, in forbidding my eyes to see, my ears to hear, and my tongue to speak what they were most concerned with—after all this, I am at length enabled to write these three words, 'I love you.' Do you know—no, you cannot know what this unnatural self-control is. I do not think any one could imagine what I have felt and what suffered, until I could write these words. Have you thought me cold, heartless, forgetful? Have you imagined—and yet you

could not do me this wrong—but yet, have you ever thought me changed in heart? or that I had forgotten that delicious period of free, unrestrained communings which we once enjoyed? I tell you I could not, if I would; forget them—they are stamped on my heart so deeply, as to become in future what you will them to be—letters of flame to consume, or of fire to enlighten me. I had longed at Christmas to tell you of my love, but then there was so much between our positions—you were so high, and I comparatively so low, that it would have been mere selfishness in me, to ask you to descend to my level. It is now changed, and in a mere worldly point of view you are as near, as, regarded in yourself, you are above me. Margaret, will you trust yourself to me? I almost feel a right to you. I know you, and comprehend you thoroughly, completely. I have read your face and your heart, and I know you as I do myself, even (as I love you) far better than myself. I can promise you the entire deep devotion of a heart which is never bestowed rashly or without thought. I promise you the sympathies of my whole being, and if you will trust yourself to me, my aim shall be to make you happy. Will you think of this, Margaret, and let me know—quickly, I need not say—for I burn and am on fire until I know your decision? for I tell you honestly my whole future being, character, and destiny is in your hands.

“LEONARD ASTON.”

There was a vigorous energy and living fire in those simple words, which struck a responsive chord in Margaret's heart. There was an end to all doubt and fear; those words, “I love you,” had settled that, and the full confirmation of all her hopes, the dismissal of all her fears, seemed to fill her heart almost to bursting. Now she might give way to all her love—now indulge those delicious reveries which she had thought it right to check. The words, “I love you”—the whole letter was read again and again, while her mind flew back to Gaunt House and all the delicious remembrances connected with it. Her glowing face was half hidden by her slender hands, and every now and then a quiet tear of intense pleasure and joy dropped upon the open letter. She long indulged in the not unnatural state of happiness which

she felt keenly after the long months of suspense she had suffered ; but the petition for a speedy answer recalled her to herself. "I must act, and that at once," she said, and composing her face she descended to communicate to her father the proposal she had just received. She did not anticipate such opposition as might seem likely, for she knew that he had almost given up his scheme as to Douglas, from the seeming coldness which he manifested ; and as he had often and in no measured terms expressed his wish that she were settled and away, she thought it probable that he would hail this proposal with joy, as relieving him of one whose presence seemed only to call up unpleasant ideas. She could not help thinking that as Mr. Philipson refrained from pressing her with Douglas' suit, whether from his expressed wish or not, he might be inclined to allow her to follow the dictates of her own heart without compulsion or undue influence. On inquiry of a servant, she learnt that her father was then engaged with a gentleman, and thinking him to be in the library where he generally received his visitors, Margaret passed into the conservatory adjoining the drawing-room, there to wait until he should be at leisure. There are some scenes connected with what may be called the fateful points of our life, which remain indelibly stamped upon the memory until the last day of our existence. Margaret never forgot the appearance of the conservatory on that morning, although, in itself, there was nothing so peculiarly striking. The air was faint with the scent of jasmine, heliotrope, and myrtle ; the stands crowded with the fairest and costliest flowers that money could procure, which seem, by their gay tints and luxuriant foliage to defy the threats of coming winter, and to speak only of funny days, genial air, the labors of bees and sports of butterflies. A few gay-coloured Indian birds fluttered about from shrub to shrub, or perched upon the festoons of jasmine with which the mimic fairy palace was adorned. Margaret was so busily engaged in caressing one of these which flew to greet her as she entered, that some few minutes had elapsed before she perceived the sound of voices in the adjoining apartment. I said that she had supposed her father

engaged in the library with his visitor—this proved not to be the case, for she soon recognised his voice in eager, indeed rather stormy conversation with some stranger who had been presented to her the other day as a Mr. Wildman. As she could not well retreat from the conservatory without attracting their notice, she was compelled to remain, and thus become an unwilling auditor of all that went on. At first she tried to fix her attention upon the flowers around her, and occupied herself in culling a few of the fairest to take up to Edith. But this resource soon failed her; and as the voices grew louder and louder, she could no longer prevent herself from hearing almost every word which went on. It was evident that the stranger, Mr. Wildman, had the better of the dispute, both from preserving his temper cool and unruffled, and from some mysterious hold which he seemed to possess over Mr. Philipson.

“You’ll think better of it, I am persuaded,” he kept repeating; “really, if I had known there was to be this scene to-day, I should not have come. What you ask is purely unreasonable—you want me to yield up that which gives me all my power over you.”

“Aye, for ten thousand pounds—a sufficiently large sum, I think.”

“No sum can be sufficiently large I answer. That paper—that will is as good as a forgery to me. You are just as much involved and as much in my hands as if you had forged. I can ruin you when I please, by accusing you to Keightley of felony—such it is, you know.”

“You forget you would ruin yourself in so doing.”

“Not in the least. I should simply say that you—did you not hear a voice somewhere?”

“No, no, it was nothing; a mouse, I dare say. Well, go on.”

“I should accuse you of trying to bribe me to conceal this later will, and you may depend upon it, I should be believed in preference to you. Men always believe those who bring them wealth.”

“Wildman, you are an incarnate fiend.”

“Pardon me—I am nothing of the kind. I do not aspire so high. Come, come, my good sir, you only detain me,

and prejudice your cause. This is the state of the case : I have in my hands a will which you acknowledge as genuine, and which deprives you of everything you have—makes you a beggar, in short. Now, is it possible that you can be silly enough to refuse me the sum of two thousand pounds down, which keeps twenty thousand a-year in your hands ?”

“ But I am already paying you one thousand pounds a-year : you said that would be enough.”

“ Quite so, my good sir. I remember saying that very well ; but have your ideas of what would ‘do,’ never changed in your life ? I fancy so. Perhaps I mean to build, or speculate, or hoard—how do you know ? Now, you cannot, I am sure, wish me to forsake you and try Keightley’s—the true heir’s generosity. Come, think better of it : I should be sorry for anything to interrupt our *friendship*.”

His wretched victim took one or two impatient turns up and down the room, but he saw the net too surely drawn close around him for him to escape. There was no help for it, and at length he went to a secret drawer in his desk, and took out notes to the required amount, which he placed in his tormentor’s hands, with the one request, “ Leave me at once.” Apparently Mr. Wildman thought he had drawn the cord tight enough, for he at once complied, and left the room without another word. Scarcely had he gone when Philipson flung himself in his chair, and covered his face with his hands.

“ Would to heaven,” he said, “ I were not such a coward as I am ! Oh, if I were but out of that man’s power—if I had but the courage to give up this will money. It is like having a coat of molten lead upon one. Why cannot I do as I know I ought ? Oh ! who is there to help me ?”

“ Let me, papa ; dear father, oh ! do let me help you,” said a soft voice by his side. He started, and looking up, recognised Margaret. She stood there, pale and wan as death, with a startled, mazed look about her, which even her attempts at self-possession could not conceal. Pale, but tearless, she looked as if petrified by some sudden blow ; but she did not faint or tremble—the shock which had shaken him had also strengthened her. Philipson looked in silent amaze at the sudden appearance of his daughter. She, so timid and

afraid of him ordinarily, now stood without flinching before him like a rebuking spirit; but there was more of love and pity than rebuke in that voice. He began to speak, but his voice was husky and slow.

"How came you here? have you dared to pry and listen?"

"No, indeed, father. I was in the conservatory, and I could not help overhearing what was said. I did not know you were here, indeed. Oh, father, will you never love or trust me, your daughter, who has never done you harm? I have heard what a great misfortune has befallen you—I know how dreadful it must be to bear; but do hear me now, father. It is not too late now. Be brave, and free yourself from that wicked man. What does it signify whether you are richer or poorer, as long as your mind is at peace? Dear father, hear me. You know I have loved you, and never disobeyed you all these long years: do, pray do be brave, and give up this ill-gotten wealth. Think it over."

In her excitement she had clasped her father's arm; he did not shake her off. He seemed dazed, half stunned by all she said, and it was not angrily that he answered.

"You don't know what you ask, Margaret. You speak like a girl, and a silly one. What? give up twenty thousand a-year—give up Margrove and all my estates, and become a beggar! No, impossible. I tell you I cannot do it. Think what all the world would say! Think—I should leave my son penniless."

He did not think of his daughter; but she was yet unmoved from her endeavours.

"What the world would say? Why, what dare it say, but that you would have acted nobly, generously. You would be free then, entirely free, and your own master. Do not say me no."

"What makes you so eager, silly girl? Do you not see that you would be beggared if I were to do it? It is not your interest."

"Oh, dear father, I did not think of that. I can think of nothing but your happiness and what is best for you. I do not care for money for myself. But think of your own name, your honor."



"There are not many who could or would say so much. Do you really love me, girl?"

"Love you? Dear father, I have never ceased to love you; and, oh how I have pined for your love."

Emboldened by his manner, she flung her arms round his neck, and for once, father and daughter were folded in a fond embrace. What ray of parental affection, what sudden gleam of sunshine it was, I know not, but that hard, cold man both received and returned his daughter's kisses, and that in a manner which left no doubt of its sincerity. But the next moment he was himself again, and putting her aside, though not unkindly, he rose, and said, as he left the room, "I cannot do as you wish—it is impossible. But remember, you must not dare to speak of this to any one—do you hear? No, not even to me again, under penalty of my severest displeasure. Mind, you do not breathe a word of what we have been speaking." He purposely averted his head, and immediately shut the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DAY OF TRIAL.

WHEN Margaret had once more regained her room and bolted her door, she sat down to try and collect her thoughts in silence and solitude. No one who has not tried to concentrate all his thoughts and mental powers upon one point, and keep them steadily fixed in contemplation of one object, can tell the difficulty there is in so doing. So natural and habitual is it to most minds to fritter themselves away upon minor details, that the very attempt to bring the powers to bear on any one idea, is the signal for all kinds of perplexing and contrary thoughts to arise and dim the mental perception. So Margaret found. She seemed utterly unable to grasp and take in the trial with which she had just become acquainted. A great cloud seemed to obscure the whole prospect, and almost to blot out memory. What was it that she had heard? Was all this a hideous dream, or could it really be true that her father had no right to all he possessed—that he knew it—and yet had placed himself under the power of that man by concealing his knowledge? And Wildman had called it felony—her father then, was a felon. The idea gave her a shudder of horror. He had said they would all be beggars. That was bad, but what was it compared with disgrace and dishonor? The mind of youth is not usually able to fully apprehend the idea of poverty. It has no terrors, or rather its terrors are not understood, and so it was not wonderful that Margaret's mind passed on to other things. Why would he not resign his ill-gotten wealth? Why had it ever come, if it was thus to be his ruin? And then the idea of Edith and her



little brother, of whom she was so fond—how would Lord Edginton's daughter bear a life of poverty? All this while she had not thought of Leonard, but when the truth flashed across her mind, it seemed as though it were too much for her reason to endure. She could not be his wife, that was plain, and she tried to force herself to understand this fully. If her father continued his compact with Wildman, she would be in some way implicated in his fraud, and disgrace she would never bring upon Leonard's head. If he gave up all, then she should be penniless; but she was obliged to confess to herself, that there seemed no probability of his doing so. No, the trial must be faced and endured, there was no help. So said conscience, but then came a subtle whisper, "What harm would there be? She was not committing or countenancing fraud; if it depended on her, she would resign at once. Was then the crime of another to embitter her whole life? Was she to be made wretched, who had done no wrong? Must she not consider Leonard? A refusal might produce fearful results upon his character, then would not she be to blame?" Well argued, thou lying spirit; no bait surer to a wavering heart than that reasoning which confuses self-interest and self-sacrifice, which persuades to the following of inclination, under the appearance of self-denial. Let us see how this is met. To say that the specious plea of concern for Leonard had no charms for Margaret, would be untrue. She was mortal, she was in love, and it seemed the only way at first to reconcile duty and inclination. It deserved a thought then. And instantly rose mental pictures, in which imagination and desire put forth their gayest, brightest, most alluring colours, and exhibited attractions, hard to be resisted. Pictures in which she and Leonard figured in an ecstatic, never ending life of love and mutual sympathies; pictures in which this love began to exercise its influence upon each of them, softening the asperities, strengthening the weaker points, refining, teaching, sanctifying all; pictures in which this influence was externally seen, casting a halo of peace, and purity, and love around. What things they might effect hand-in-hand. Oh, what a life and labour of happiness. So sang the fiend.

Such was the prospect reflected in her glass—such the arguments addressed to the listener's ears. Listening ears indeed, but not compliant. The heart gave no response, and conscience happily neither deadened nor silent, now began to raise her voice of warning, "You would gain all this, perhaps, and even this is far from certain, but at what loss? The utter ruin of your peace of mind. How could you enjoy pleasures purchased by a fraud?—how could you look your honourable, upright husband honestly in the face? You cannot disguise from yourself, that if you were to marry Leonard you would be acting unfairly, deceitfully. What good could you hope to effect?—what pleasures to enjoy in a state of life thus begun? Be brave and resist." So was she lost between the two opposite currents. But conscience conquered. The struggle was hard: for hours she wrestled with the enemy, for the demon, oft baffled, returned oft again with new suggestions and temptations; but her bitter cry for help was heard and she resisted. She saw in its true light, the nature of the crime she would commit by marrying Leonard while affairs were in such a state—she saw the consequences which must ensue, and at length she was able to say to herself firmly, though with every muscle and nerve agonized by the effort, "I will not do this wickedness, for such I know it." But the prey was not to be allowed to escape so easily, nor were the tempter's arts at an end. Then came the agonizing question, how to refuse Leonard—upon what plea? She was bound to secrecy and was unable to give the true reason; what other could she give? Say she did not love him? How, when every pulse, every thought, every part of her proclaimed the reverse. What could she say, when the truth must remain untold, and her real feelings disguised? Her words would seem equivocating, insincere, trifling; and then such a throng of reflections upon the answer she might have returned, and his joy in reading it came thronging in upon her, that, fearful of a declension from her resolution, she at once sat down and tried to put her thoughts on paper. It required all her energy and determination to do so. There lay Leonard's letter which she dared not trust her-

self even to look at, and the tender words and intense affection of which would come creeping insiduously back into her memory. She mechanically pushed it away from her as though its very contact were dangerous, and summoning all her courage, wrote as follows :—"Do not accuse me of insincerity, fickleness, or coldness when you read what so deeply, bitterly, grieves me to write. I cannot be your wife, and yet you must not ask me why. This seems, I know, strange to you, but still I ask you to trust in me. Do not judge me harshly. Farewell." Few words these, remarkable for neither eloquence nor skill, and yet what had it not cost her to write them ! She would not stay to reflect on what she had done. She would not even trust herself to read what she had written, or to pause over alterations, but she placed those few lines in an envelope, directed in a trembling hand to "Leonard Aston, Esq., Gaunt House," and at once saw it deposited in the letter bag. Then, at length when she felt that she had, indeed, won the victory, and sacrificed the dearest wish and desire of her heart, when she perceived the sunshine taken out of her whole life, her hopes dashed rudely to the ground, even then, in the midst of all this darkness and misery, was she able to feel thankful that she had acted as she had. "I would not have it undone," she said, though now for the first time, the tears began to steal down her cheeks. She leant her head upon the table to ease the impetuous throbbings which racked it, and tried to think out bit by bit all the events of the day ; still as each dark shadow closed in upon her, and she felt as in the gloom of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, she tried to discover in all that dismal prospect the path of her future duty. Every now and then, her thoughts would turn to her father ; and great as her own grief was, she could not but confess his to be worse, for not only had he the daily crushing weight of secrecy preying upon him, not only did he suffer from constant apprehension of discovery and exposure, but, moreover, he had not even the consolation of having acted uprightly, or the testimony of conscience to support him. Yes, his case was worse ; and how would all this end ? But the prospect was too gloomy to bear

inspection or questioning, and with a cry for help, she determined to leave the issue of all this in other and Higher hands, and patiently to do her own duty meanwhile. When she raised her head and caught sight of herself in the glass, she could scarcely believe that the pale, tearful countenance she saw, belonged to her. How joyous and happy had she been but a few hours back, how utterly unconscious of the future, how reliant upon its good prospect! Oh, how great a change had those few hours brought about. From a careless happy child, she felt converted into a woman, a melancholy wreck of all her hopes and desires. She paused in her glance at the glass, and resolutely said to herself, "I have learnt one lesson, that it is a duty to suffer. I *will* carry it out if it be required. Margaret Philipson, think what were you born for, but to fulfil your duty. You have talked of courage under difficulties, of perseverance under all trials and temptation; you have even thought yourself equal to them. Now, see the time has come. Show that courage which you thought you possessed, or else try and acquire it!" Strengthened and refreshed by having calmly faced all her trouble, she resolved to go as usual to Edith, hoping that any agitation would pass unobserved, or be attributed to one of the headaches from which she sometimes suffered. So, after bathing her face with Eau-de-Cologne and removing all traces of her late excitement, she descended, as was her wont at that hour, to sit with Edith, whose constant companion she had become. Thus passed the day of trial.

CHAPTER XXX.

S A H A R A.

THE postal communication between Gaunt House and Marbury was of the most primitive description. The House was too far from the Northmoor circuit, to allow of a special visit from the postman, who only came to the head of a lane distant about a quarter of a mile, at which point some emissary from the farm appeared, and relieved him of such letters as were intended for the Astons. When the day on which he knew he might expect an answer from Margaret arrived, Leonard was far too impatient to wait for the slow progress of the dilatory plough boy, who was likely to make considerable pauses in his way down the lane, abounding in blackberries, and accordingly determined to go himself. The walk was pleasant, for the air was fresh and clear, and the sun beginning to be felt. Every now and then a started hare would cross the path, or a pheasant rise with a whirr and heavily fly away into the little copse at the side of the lane. But Leonard was thinking of other things than hares or pheasants, although those are not unnatural or unwelcome ideas to a sportsman on a bright autumnal morning. He was thinking of how he had walked down that very lane with Margaret the year before, and how soon he hoped to have her there again, to renew those delicious rambles. His time of trial had been a long and hard one: those months in which he had "kept silence—yea, even from good words"—what a dismal blank they had seemed; how long, how wearisome! But even so, he did not regret having waited as he had done. His conscience did not reprove him—he had acted honourably, and now he was about to receive his reward. Then his thoughts passed on to Margaret. "I can just see her," said he, "as she

receives my letter : the look of wonder at first, and then the quick, bright blush, when she recognises my hand. I know she will read it all through once and again, before she fully takes it all in. I am sure she will be surprised. And then when she begins to answer—perhaps, though, her father may refuse? No, it is not likely. Once, perhaps, he might have done so, but now the birth of this son and heir has entirely engrossed him, and he is only too likely to be glad to have her married, selfish as he is. How can he be the father of so fair a flower? I never knew two persons so utterly dissimilar as he and Margaret—he all world and self, she simplicity and amiability. Well, I cannot congratulate myself on the father-in-law I am likely to have, but Margaret is enough to make up for many such. How late the post is to-day. It certainly must be spoken about.” Now the postman was not really later than usual, though Leonard’s haste made him seem so; but waiting is tedious work, and we are apt, even the most just of us, to blame the wrong persons. Just as he had come to that stern resolve I have mentioned, and was pacing impatiently up and down the lane at the point of its junction with the high road, the sound of a horse near at hand, and turning round, he recognised to his disgust, Frederic Turner approaching him at a brisk pace.

That young gentleman was one of the few persons that Leonard unmitigatedly disliked, and truth to tell, there was little enough in him to make him acceptable. Vain, pig-headed and opinionative, he was too fond of the sound of his own voice to care whether the topics of his conversation were agreeable to others, or indeed whether his startling pieces of intelligence possessed any stable ground-work of fact. He seemed to have the art of telling you just the very things you least wished to hear, and his remarks generally resembled the buzzing and stings of gnats, and other unpleasant insects of the same order. He rode up open-mouthed on seeing Leonard.

“Why, Aston, this is a wonder, to see you outside your own gates! What keeps you so much at home? Are you trying the life of a monk?”

"There is little, save business, to tempt me out," was the response, while an impatient glance was at the same time directed towards the path along which the postman ought to be coming.

"Oh, you are waiting for the post, are you? well, I can tell you for your comfort, he will not be here this ten minutes. He was at Lyson's as I passed, and I brought on my own letters. One from the Duke of Bumbledom—here it is," and the ingenuous youth held up a letter gorgeously emblazoned with the armorial bearings of the noble house of Bumbledom, two fable beetles rampant and a cocked-hat couchant, legend, "Wha dare meddle wi' me." He expected to crush Leonard with the sight, but he only answered—

"Oh, yes, I see the steward uses the crest; very pretty indeed."

"Stay a minute, man, what a hurry you are in; you must stay for the post, you know, and we may as well have a talk meanwhile. Have you heard the news? Philipson has sent down two hundred pounds for the rifle corps at Marbury—awful liberal, isn't it? They are talking of giving him a dinner when he comes down. Shall you go?"

"Time enough to talk about that when the day comes."

"Every one will be there I should think, so if you don't come you'll miss a good thing. By the bye, have you heard the news?"

"What news?"

"Oh, about Margaret Philipson—didn't you know something of her?"

"Yes, I do know her; what is it?"

"I wonder how you came to know her intimately, for I don't think her father likes you; I may be wrong you know, but that is what I thought."

"Is that all your news, Turner?"

"No, nonsense man, of course not. Then don't you know she is going to be married?"

Leonard's heart gave a great leap, but in a minute after he chided himself for caring for such intelligence from so well known a chatterer.

"Indeed," said he, quietly, "I suppose you have some authority for your assertions?"

"'Authority'—there, that is just like you: one would think you were a lawyer. Of course, I have the best authority—namely, my own eye-sight: but every one knows it. She has thrown overboard Forbes, her father's brother-in-law, you know; though, why she has done it, I can't think, for he is sure to be Viscount Edginton—and now is going to marry young Trevennen."

In spite of himself, Leonard started.

"Ah, you are astonished, I dare say, but I know it is a fact. I was in town a few weeks ago, and I saw Miss Philipson and Trevennen riding side by side in the Park, quite like an engaged couple. Besides, I know it, because Edwards of the Twenty-first told it me as a fact. Oh, she is a regular cunning one, depend upon it, though I think she has made a mistake here."

"You must be aware that nothing but certain knowledge of facts can warrant you in speaking thus of a lady."

"Well, if you lived more in the world, and mixed in society, as I do, you would know that every one believes and thinks the same that I do about this. Hallo, there is the postman at last!"

And, indeed, just at that moment, when Leonard felt inclined to quarrel with the wretched little bit of mortality at his side, the letter bag made its appearance.

"Three letters for you, sir."

There they were—two large, coarse envelopes, containing, perhaps, circulars or notices of "Thorley's Food for Cattle," or some such "farm requisite," and the third, a little fairy note, directed in a trembling female hand, to "Leonard Aston, Esq., Gaunt House Farm, Marborough"—there was no mistaking that, though he had never seen any of Margaret's handwriting before, he fancied that he should have recognised it among many others.

"Hum, fair correspondent I see: so that's what brings you out. Well, I suppose I am in the way. Good-bye," and off trotted Mr. Turner, fancying that he had said agreeable telling remarks enough by this time to sustain

his (fancied) character of a smart-spoken and witty companion.

Hugely relieved at his departure, Leonard turned down the lane, and began by mighty steps to make towards the farm. What a curious, contradictory animal man is! For three days he had longed for this letter; had counted the hours till when it could arrive; had speculated on the exact nature of its contents; in short, had centred all his hopes and future upon it. But a few hours back he would have given up all he possessed for the power of anticipating time, and becoming acquainted with his fate—*now* the missive he had so eagerly desired was in his hands, one snap to the fragile seal would place the contents before him; five minutes pertual would give him all the information he wished, and yet, he had not the courage to open it. He held it curiously before him, scrutinised the direction, the seal, the postmark—looked at them again and again, but still could not summon resolution enough to read it. He continued in this state of hesitation, until the appearance of the Moated Farm and the sight of his mother taking her morning walk in the garden, recalled him to his senses. “What a child I am—how absurd,” he said, with a half smile, and broke the seal. The next moment, his eye had travelled over the few words the letter contained, had read them again before he seemed fully to comprehend it, and then with a ghastly effort at composure, he joined his mother and tried to make some observation upon the weather. What does the quick eye of a mother not perceive? What artifice can deceive maternal instinct? Mrs. Aston, fully as anxious as her son, had entered into all his feelings and waited impatiently for his return. She had noticed the quick motion by which he tore the letter open, and accustomed as she was to decipher every line, every light and shadow, and changeful glance of his face, had read in it as clearly as in a book, ruin, disappointment. His assumed cheerfulness, could not blind her for an instant; and as he came towards her, she fondly placed her arm within his and led him towards the house. He tottered like a child or a blind person, but still with all the energy of his

iron nature, tried again to make some observation, it ended in a hysterical laugh, and now fairly conquered, he flung himself into a chair and covered his face with his hands. No time for words. He *could* not speak, he could not find a single word to tell his grief.

Mrs. Aston was silent. It is frightful to see a man suffer when the fullest extent of his powers is exerted to conceal the appearance of sorrow. Better they should weep, far better they should be loud, and noisy, and querulous in their complaints, than that dead, frigid silence, which, though ice-bound outwardly, really conceals a very hurricane and volcano of passion within. At length Leonard raised his head and gazed in his mother's face, already overflowing in sympathetic tears, "You know all then?"

"All indeed, my dear child."

"There read it and see," and he pushed the fatal letter across to her. She took it up and silently perused it, then placing it near him, passed her arms round his neck and imprinted upon his forehead a sweet, motherly kiss. "Dearest Leonard, I am indeed bitterly disappointed, bitterly. I did not expect it. I blame myself for my advice."

"Don't say so—did you not do it for the best? No, I have none to thank but myself for this."

Mrs. Aston again took up the letter and read it. "I cannot understand it at all, my boy; there is some mystery."

"Mystery, yes indeed, the only mystery is that I did not see this before—that I can have been so blind. Mother, I would accuse no one rashly, but I feel as sure, as I am that the sun is in the sky, that Marg—that Miss Philipson is engaged to Arthur Trevennen."

"Oh no, Leonard, that cannot be, I am sure."

"Yes, but listen. She was intimate at Massingbury before she was here. She used to see him continually, and I know he admired her. I know it, because it was talked of; and besides, all one's faculties, and memory, and reflection seem to return after a blow like this. Don't you remember what Sybil said about Trevennen's evident admiration for Margaret, and how he shewed it at the Bee at Northmoor?—yes, I am sure you do, well; and I have often heard at times, though I have refused to listen to,

or mind it, that she was not adverse to his attentions—why, only this very morning I was told by young Turner that she was engaged to be married to him: he had seen them riding together in London. I didn't heed it then, but now it is as clear as the day. Mother, I do not blame her—remember, no word has passed my lips against her. She was free to act as she pleased. But I—oh, what a vain idiot; what an absurd fool I must have been to have fancied she cared the least for me. Well, thank God, I have my mother's love to look to. That at least is firm; but oh, what reeds they have been that I have trusted to! Well, my dream, I hope, is over."

As he said, he strode to the door with firmly set mouth and clenched teeth, betraying the intensity of his emotion. But he suddenly turned, as though his heart misgave him, and clasping his mother in his arms, showered down kisses upon her.

"My own dearest mother, I am not half good enough for you. Why did I not rest content with your love? I know that I am weak, miserably weak, but my whole life seemed bound up and centred in her."

Again he turned away and left Mrs. Aston, and in a few minutes his step sounded in the yard, and his voice was as firm as he gave his directions to his men, as if nothing had happened. But a fearful gloom had fallen on the house. Mrs. Aston sat alone in melancholy solitude, a prey to anticipations of evil to come. She knew, that brave it out as he would, in spite of his apparent stoicism, his inward grief was really consuming him. He went about the farm and tried to attend to all his duties as usual, but it was in a taciturn, almost dogged way, which excited the wonder of the men so long accustomed to his gentle manners. He made constant mistakes, gave contrary directions, and indeed, in all his proceedings, betrayed that his heart was elsewhere. His favourite dog followed him unheeded, and in vain tried to attract his attention. He would go out shooting and return without having let off his gun, or having fired in so wild and reckless a way, as to excite the keeper's wonder and alarm. Sometimes he would mount his hunter and gallop furiously for hours during the long, dreary winter afternoons

over field and fen, putting his horse at leaps from which in calmer moments even he, daring rider as he was, would have turned. And then he would return home jaded, weary, and haggard, with a face that told the fearful ravage care was making upon him. He would sit in his great arm-chair, and after some faint attempts at conversation with his mother, would relapse into a deep, moody silence, from which it was difficult to rouse him. He was exactly in that state of mind which would have driven a man of weaker moral principle and more animal passions, to intoxication, as a means of drowning his cares and driving away reflection. But Leonard Aston did not drink—he was mentally consuming himself, and day after day saw him more reserved, more morose, nearer to—madness: yes, that is the name for it. That it is in which mental griefs, endured in the manner I have described, end; and so, doubtless, it would have been with Leonard, had not he been roused to action in time. All this is very wrong, I know, in my hero, and I am very sorry for it. You, my dear Mr. Jones, pronounce it cowardly. Quite true, it was cowardly, and *you*, I am aware, would not have acted so. You, when you were refused by Miss Briggs, the great tallow heiress, went to your club, ate your chop, drank your pint of claret, and mentally compared yourself to Zeno, Diogenes, or some other such great philosopher. Indeed I believe you tried your hand at a copy of verses to C. B., and a greater proof of heart-wholeness than that I cannot imagine. But then you see, dear sir, Leonard Aston was not Richard Jones: that is where the misfortune lay. He had not that wonderful rectitude of principle and back-bone, that *noli me tangere* of moral impeccability which distinguishes the whole family of Jones. He was a man of strong feelings and intense emotions, habitually repressed and concealed. He had allowed his mind to dwell for months upon one object, had built castles and laid out airy pleasure gardens therein. Well, they had fallen in a heap of ruins, such as owls and satyrs rejoice in, and he felt himself imprisoned in them, and unable to escape. His mind had become a moral Sahara, a waste of arid, bitter sand, unrelieved by fountains, unrefreshed by the pleasant shade of palms. Yet Leonard was a religious man: by which

I do not mean to say, a man who goes to church exactly one hundred-and-four times in the year, puts an occasional half-crown in the alm's plate, and testifies his churchmanship by hating the Dissenters, and eating turkey and plum pudding at Christmas ; all this, doubtless, is highly desirable, respectable, and meritorious, but Leonard went farther than this. His religion pervaded and "flavoured" (to use an odd expression), all his acts, public and private. It was his aim to walk himself as became a Christian, to rule his household on the same principle.

Money, time, and still more, thought, he gave willingly and ungrudgingly to what he esteemed duty. His care for the personal and spiritual condition of the families he employed was great, and he scarcely ever undertook any great work connected with them, without the previous advice of his clergyman. But unfortunately, as he himself had long ago told Margaret, mere "duty" took too large a share in all this, and real love, hearty pleasure in well-doing occupied a lesser and more subordinate position. Hence, when he came to the balance, he was found wanting: his principles of abstract duty failed him in the hour of trial, and he broke down under his burden. The image of Margaret, the bitter overthrow of all his hopes was never absent from his mind. He brooded over it in a gloomy terrible silence, and though by indefatigable exertions, he forced himself to continue in a great measure his avocations, yet heart and soul were gone, and there remained but a dry, dead husk, withered and sapless. His mother watched the progress of all this with dismay. She had seen him so, though not to so great extent, years before, but at that time the natural buoyancy of early youth had borne him safely over the waters of the dead sea. What was there to hope for now ? Was he at two and thirty to settle down into a morose, disappointed man, discontented with himself and the whole world ? No, something must be tried. She would suggest travel to him, change of scene might turn aside his thoughts to brighter prospects. Accordingly one evening when the work of the day was done and they were sitting by the fire, while the four winds seemed to be holding a trial of strength outside, she broached the idea.

"Leonard, dear, I have been thinking, and I want you to go abroad a short time. You know you have often wished it, and I am sure that I and Dixon could manage in your absence; what do you think of it?"

"Thank you, mother, for your care for me. To tell the truth, my own thoughts have turned that way. But not, I think, in the way you mean."

"How, then?"

"I could not bear to go about France and Italy alone, 'doing' ruins and poking about show places; it would be Purgatory—I could not do it. No, mother, my thoughts ran upon India."

"India, my child! what can have made you think of that? You could not visit it too, just now, while this horrible Sikh war is raging as it seems to be."

"Nay, that is what would take me there; as a volunteer, I mean."

There was a dead silence broken only by the howling wind, which raged outside. Mrs. Aston leant her head on her hand, and tried to conceal the tears which dropped fast.

"I had never thought to see this," she said at last. "Oh, my boy, this is a sharp trial. Think well before you decide."

No eloquent, dissuasive speech could have touched her son more. He flung himself down at her side, and looking up in her face, cried out—

"Forgive me, my dearest mother, forgive me. I know I am selfish, but oh! you cannot tell what an utter blank my life has become! I could not have believed it possible; all is so changed and wretched, and I feel I cannot struggle against it. Well, I will not leave you, mother; whatever it may cost me, I will stay on here."

"No, my child, I do not ask that. I will not be selfish. But all I say is this—be sure you know your mind. I cannot say how much I feel for you; I know what a fearful blow you have received, and how hard it must be to struggle against despondency, and so far from trying to dissuade you from it, I advise you to go away for a time. India, I confess, I never thought of; but I will be no obstacle in your way."

If you feel that you need so great a change, go, and God's blessing go with you."

"No, mother, it shall not be so. I will try and struggle against my feelings—I will do all I can, and then, if at last I find that I cannot conquer them, I will go, but only when you yourself bid it."

So it was agreed. For some weeks Leonard tried manfully to overcome his despondency: he commenced new undertakings, seemed to take greater interest in the farm, and worked incessantly at his various schemes. But in vain. All this time his mind was elsewhere: it refused to be occupied and amused in these things, and continually returned to its old gloomy train of ideas. He ate nothing, and at the end of five weeks he had so ghastly and wan an aspect, that his mother at last gave way, and leading him one day to a picture representing him in the full flush of health and mental vigour, said, "I knew that boy once; go, my child, and bring him back to me from India."

A few days after that, Leonard Aston had written to the Horse Guards and obtained permission to join a regiment just departing, as a volunteer against the rebel Sikhs.

Strange to say, in that same regiment he found an old schoolfellow of his, although, his junior by many years. Charles Swansea had just joined his regiment, which was ordered out to active service, and it was in the purchase of his outfit that he and his mother met with Leonard. Mutual recognition ensued, and the few days which elapsed before the sailing of their vessel, were spent by Leonard almost entirely at Mrs. Swansea's. Naturally anxious about her wild, good-tempered, reckless son, she confided much in Leonard's superior judgment and principle, and before they left she begged of him to watch over him and bring him back again in safety, a promise which he unhesitatingly gave without much reflection. How it was redeemed we shall see. So at length he departed, and the widowed mother was left in the Moated Farm alone, where her daily cry became, "If I am bereaved of my child, I am bereaved."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BATTLE.

YET another moment and the soft, sheeny, silver flood of the Eastern sky will be turned into an ocean of gold, barred with purple and scarlet islets. There! "the breath of morning has stirred," the orient light has kissed the tops of the palm trees, and the broad plain on which the hostile armies are encamped, smiles as fair and bright as though before night it were not to be stained a russet red with the life blood of the bravest. It is known throughout the whole British line that there will be an engagement to-day, and the consequent bustle of preparation begins at an early hour. The orderlies are dashing from hut to hut with various commands; pickets are being relieved, and presently large bodies of men are on the move. Sir Henry Dundas, the Chief in command, is to be seen at all points, conspicuous on his white charger. He is surrounded by the principal officers, with whom he is now holding a council of war. Meanwhile no less activity is observed below among the dusky forces of the Sikhs in their entrenched camp. Although situated on lower ground, yet their position is so well fortified and strengthened by art, as to be in reality preferable to the sloping declivity on which the British forces are encamped. They are superior also in numbers, being able to oppose more than 50,000 men to the 17,000 of the English. It is evident the forthcoming struggle will be a hardly-contested one, and the rival armies are eager for the strife. The younger officers who have not been summoned to the council, having seen to the due preparation of their men, are now standing about in groups, discussing the impending struggle,



as quietly and calmly as though it were some amusing game, instead of the fatal encounter it is like to be. Two of them stand somewhat apart; the one quite a young officer of eighteen or nineteen, the other a man in half uniform, in reality about thirty, but his face wears an impression of some great grief or anxiety which is slowly consuming his soul, and reckoning every day an age. We know them both, reader, Charles Swansea and Leonard Aston. The former is half wild with joy at the anticipation of the coming battle.

"Isn't it famous, Aston? At last we shall come hand to hand with these black dogs. Aren't you pleased, man?"

"Yes, very," is the calm rejoinder.

"But you don't look half delighted enough. It is just what I have been longing for. Have you ever been under fire before, Aston?"

"Only once, and that was a mere skirmish—sharp work, though, as long as it lasted."

"Ah, it will be no skirmish to-day, I can tell you, old fellow; those dusky rebels down there are pretty strong, both in men and guns. I wish you might be near me in action. I should like to charge side by side with you. It makes me half mad with excitement, when I go dashing along right through the ranks of me—it's a feeling I can't describe. Only fox-hunting, with a good run, is equal to it. What makes you look so grave, Aston?"

"Fighting is rather more serious work than fox-hunting. Do you never anticipate that you may fall yourself?"

"I never chose to think of that beforehand, and when one is engaged there is an end to thought. No time for anything but blows."

"Nevertheless, Swansea, I want you to promise me one thing—don't get too excited and venturesome to-day. Promise to take care of yourself."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow. Why, you are enough to make a man chicken-hearted. Why should I come to grief to-day any more than another day?"

"I don't know, Swansea; it is only a foreboding of my own. I only wish I might be with you."

"I hope you may—it would be very jolly. Well, look here now, Aston, as you *will* talk on these subjects, I may as well let you know what I have done. You'll find in my tent, my will and a letter to my mother placed in the bible she gave me: you may tell her that I often used it. I have left her everything that I have. You will see about that, won't you? And my sword—the ebony and silver hilted one—I have left for you, it is the only thing I ever saw you admire. You will see to all these things I am sure. Will you do one thing more? I want you to cut off a lock of my hair after I am dead, and keep it for my mother; will you promise to do this faithfully?"

"I promise you, Swansea, for my part, faithfully. Now, do *you* remember that I have left full directions in my tent for the disposal of what things I have."

The two friends cemented their promises by a firm grasp of the hand in silence. Swansea was the first to speak.

"Aston, you have been a good friend to me and kept me out of harm's way. I wonder how it is we have got on so well together, for we are unlike enough, I am sure."

"That is the very reason why we have continued good friends. Do you know there is a kind of sympathy between a suffering, desponding heart, and a happy, buoyant mood like yours. I recognise in you just what I myself was at your age."

"Do you mean to say, Aston, that you were ever so harum-scarum as I am—why, I can scarcely believe it."

"Perhaps not quite so giddy, but quite as light-hearted. Now I feel I am entirely changed since then. I only hope you may never undergo such trouble."

"Was it that then, that brought you out here, Aston? I have always thought that there must be some great grief or another which you kept to yourself. The fellows have absurd rumours and reports."

"I dare say they have. You are right, Swansea, in thinking that some trouble brought me out here as a volunteer. But since I have been here I have learnt the fruitlessness of my endeavours to escape from it. Grief and trouble must be boldly faced and encountered: not

fled from. If we try to flee, they pursue with doubled forces. No ; I see now, my mistake and my selfishness. I have been a coward and neglected all my real duties in trying to escape from what must be borne. Please God my life is spared to-day, I will return to England as soon as my honour and my engagements here will permit. Ha ! what is that ?" added he, abruptly, as a puff of white smoke from the enemy's camp momentarily obscured the view, and then was followed by the boom of a cannon, "they have begun."

"Hurrah," was the response of his young friend, and just then an aide-de-camp came dashing up with orders to Swansea to join his men, and to Leonard to follow him to Sir H. Dundas. The two friends separated, in what, by any other than the English nation, would be considered a cold, formal manner—that is, with a firm grasp of each other's hand, a half unsteady glance in each other's faces, and a "Good-bye, old fellow," which struggled to be firm and calm. Two friends of almost any other nation would have hurled themselves into each other's arms, embraced and interchanged a thousand caressing and endearing terms ; and all this would have meant ?—why, about the same that this sturdy handshake did, and no more. Whether he showed it or not, Leonard was mightily moved within at parting from the boy he had promised to guard so faithfully. Some presentiment or foreboding of it was upon him, and as he left him, he felt fully convinced that he had seen him alive for the last time, though he could give no satisfactory reason for this persuasion, save that Swansea was almost "fey," his spirits were too high and excited to be natural. Did Leonard Aston's thoughts once turn to the chance of his own death being at hand ?

Now, if I wanted to make Leonard a perfect hero, I should unmistakably reply that the thought of death had not so much as reached his heart, nor could it have any terrors for him ; or if I wanted a melo-dramatic hero, I should make him in ecstasy-forrow, plunge wildly into the thickest of the fray, do incredible deeds of valour, kill his tens of thousands, and either fall gloriously or return victoriously,

as best suited the current of my tale. But you must know Leonard is not a perfect hero. I really want you, good reader, to look upon him as a man like yourself, neither very good nor very bad, so I may as well say out at once that Leonard had well revolved the chance of death, and was compelled to acknowledge that that idea, that phantom, had better have been met in the pleasant grounds of Gaunt House, amidst household ties, old friends, and home duties, where, if need be, he might die at his post, than here on this arid, foreign land, an exile from his native country, his mother, his old course of duties and employment. What had sent him here? His own selfish disposition. What had he gained? The comfortable assurance that whereas before he was not to blame for his troubles, *now* he had to charge himself with selfishness and moral cowardice. Unromantic thoughts, these for a hero, reader! Unromantic, truly, but perhaps none the worse for that. Perhaps war and death are too much of realities to suit with much romance. Perhaps, on the whole, Leonard's thoughts were as well occupied with confessing and acknowledging his own faults and mistakes, as if they had been fixed on forthcoming glory, matchless prowess, and the gratitude of a saved country.

At all events, as he mounted his horse and moved off to where he saw Sir Henry Dundas, he muttered to himself, looking round on the vast body of men around, "These all will die at their posts and in their duty—what business have I here?"

Sir Henry, unable to pierce within and see the thoughts of his volunteer's heart, greeted him warmly.

"You will have, I trust, a fine opportunity of seeing real warfare to-day, Mr. Aston. I hope you are well prepared? I think of placing you with the light cavalry on the left," said he, indicating its position. "You will be welcome there, though you know your services will not be required yet."

Leonard bowed, and galloped off to his proper place, in the midst of a roar like concentrated thunder, which proclaimed the contest begun. For about two hours the tremendous cannonade continued, with scarce a moment's

pause. The Sikhs had the advantage of numbers, the English of experience and superior skill. Whenever the smoke cleared off, it was easy to see the ravages which the cannon had made in the strongly entrenched camp, in spite of its gallant defence: the rude outworks were in many places broken down—huge breaches were apparent, and at length the English general gave orders for carrying the works by assault. Under cover of a tremendous discharge both of cannon and musketry, the infantry advance in lines, widely extended, so as best to bear the deadly fire which is poured upon them. Twice they pause, and a momentary hush runs along the whole line; but now again they are close, reduced in number it is true, but firm in rank and dauntless in spirit. In another minute the scaling-ladders are placed and immediately thronged—in vain the cannon sweep them away—in vain are missiles of all kinds poured upon the struggling mass beneath; they form anew, and return with redoubled energy to the contest. At last their efforts are crowned with success—three ladders are firmly planted, and defy all efforts for their overthrow. The contest is hand to hand, and the bristling lines of spear and bayonet points, seem at length to heave and break up. Fresh forces arrive continually to support their fellows, and now, sword in hand, a youthful figure, which Leonard fancies must be Swansea, is the first to enter the deadly breach. First, but not the only one—one minute more, and hundreds on hundreds, with loud cries of victory, which are echoed by their comrades on the heights, press forward, and with fierce, barbarous shouts, the enemy are repulsed and thrown into utter confusion. All is despair and ruin. Their huge masses only serve to entangle and confuse them, and the rout becomes general. A body of native cavalry is advanced so as to cover their retreat towards the river in their rear. Sir Henry's keen eye soon perceives the necessity of breaking this in order to continue the pursuit, and immediate orders to charge come down to the light cavalry where Leonard is. One moment more, and with a shout of joy at release from their inaction, the splendid body of men dashes forward. The distance which separates them is short, and

they are quickly face to face with the enemy. Mindful of old days with the Marbury hounds, Leonard sits firm as a rock on his saddle, with glittering sabre ready in his strong right hand. To him it is almost a delirious and maddening gallop, mid a dusky cloud of dust which rises high over head; and though thoughts of fear are far away, yet the rapid pulsations of the heart, attest that every nerve is strained to the utmost. The enemy receive them firmly, but in vain endeavour to withstand that impetuous rush—the sheer force of the horses bears them down and overthrows them, and they break and scatter, still, however, fighting with the energy of despair. Leonard's sword at once disables the gigantic Sikh who tries to grapple with him and drag him from his horse, and his broken arm renders him powerless. A fearful blow is aimed at his head, but is met and parried by his serjeant who rides near him. Again and again that glittering sabre, now crimson stained, is raised aloft, and each time a dusky warrior falls before its irresistible blow. Like deeds of prowess are done on every side, nor done in vain, for the rout of the cavalry, the last hope of the enemy, is now complete. Their broken line now rushes after the fugitive infantry from the camp, and a fearful pursuit commences. Shrieks and groans resound on every side, as the infuriated and excited horses trample recklessly over the living mass beneath. It is impossible to turn them aside, so thickly lie the dead, and friend and foe are mingled in an inextricable heap of pain. No quarter is asked or given—the conflict is to the death, and the only safety in flight. But at length Sir Henry perceives that the pursuit has continued far enough, and fearful lest the Sikhs should gather courage and turn upon the small body of cavalry which had so effectually routed them, he sounds the order for their recall. It is obeyed with reluctance, and scarcely concealed disappointment by the men, who are now thoroughly enraged, and burn to revenge many an old reverse and adverse fortune. But they are too well disciplined to disregard orders, and return as soon as possible to the British camp. It was on their way that Leonard first began to see the magnitude of the contest in which he had been engaged. Heaps on heaps of wounded or dead lay

about in all directions, left by them in their victorious charge. Every now and then some poor wretch would wearily endeavour to raise himself and escape from the horrible *melée* in which he was entangled. Occasionally a horse, wounded and maddened with the pain, would free itself from its prostrate rider, and gallop fiercely over the unhappy men who covered the plain, and who saw with horror—saw, without hopes of escape, the fierce quadruped bringing death and anguish towards them.

As he looked on all this and mentally pondered upon the necessary miseries of war—as he asked himself, “What are all these now, and what have they done to be as they are”—he was roused by a plunge from his horse and a sharp, intense pain, like a blow from a red hot cinder upon his arm. A wounded Sikh over whom his horse had stumbled, roused by the pain, had started up and fastened like a lion upon the saddle, aiming one fierce, desperate blow, which had caused the sensation mentioned. Another minute, and a cut from Leonard’s sword once more brought him to the dust, where he rolled in the agony of death. There was little time for bandaging or examining the wound, and he contented himself with having the handkerchief of one of the soldiers bound upon it, and so resumed his place in the ranks, scarcely feeling the pain in the excitement of the moment. Loud applause from all their comrades, and a few terse, but much prized expressions of congratulation from Sir Henry, greeted them on their return. Those who were wounded, gave themselves up to the doctor’s care. But Leonard was too anxious about the fate of his friend Swansea, to tarry or take heed to his own hurts. He quickly sought out the regiment to which he belonged, and asked again and again of all he met, what had become of him. None seemed to know, though all who had seen him at all, bore witness to the reckless valour which distinguished him. His regiment had been divided, and the company to which he belonged had not returned from the pursuit in the camp. At length, forgetting discipline in his increasing anxiety, Leonard turned his steps towards the camp and that place where he fancied he had

seen him with the scaling party. Just as he arrived, he met a young officer belonging to the same regiment !

"Well, Aston, what do you think of this for a victory ? Why, there must be eight or nine thousand of the rebels slain. But have you heard of our loss ? I mean poor Swansea."

"What, dead ? I feared as much. I was just in search of him."

"Dead, aye and worse. Those black rascals have his body ; he was the first to fall, and they seized him at once. Why, Aston, you are going to faint, how white you look."

"Never mind me, for heaven's sake go on ; dead, did you say ? There, tell me all."

"Our men fought like lions round him, and tried to get his body back, but you know we were all so occupied in driving them out of the camp, and so they escaped with it ; we did all we could."

"And do you mean to say, that Swansea's body is in their hands now ?"

"Indeed, I do, and heartily sorry I am to say it ; they were some fellows of one of the chiefs' body guards who seized him."

"And where are they now ?"

"Oh, with all the rest ; rather behind, I should say, by the river, where they paused. Why, Aston, where are you off to ?"

But he spoke in vain, for Leonard was far out of reach already, and frantically urging on his jaded horse towards the little eminence where he had last seen Sir Henry Dundas. Swansea dead, and in the hands of the Sikhs, perhaps mutilated, or ill-used ; and this was the young man whom he was to guard and protect. Well, his death it had been impossible for him to prevent, but he had promised to bring him home dead or alive, and this, at least, he would try to do. It was not too late to rescue his body—he would do all man can to effect it.

"Where is Sir Henry ?" said he, to the first sentinel he met.

"In his tent, sir, with some of the officers, and I do not think he can see any one."

"But I must see him, nevertheless ; it is business of importance—of great importance."

Moved by his manner, the sentinel opened the tent door, and announced him, and Leonard was immediately admitted.

"Well, Mr. Aston, what can I do for you? Is anything the matter?"

"Swansea—Lieutenant Swansea of the —th, they have carried off his body, and he was the first man to enter the camp."

"I am heartily sorry to hear it," said Sir Henry, and all present were equally moved. "He was a very promising young officer. I am sorry for your loss, Mr. Aston, for I believe you were great friends. But is this all you have to announce," added he, glancing with surprise at his hasty and agitated appearance.

"No, indeed, Sir Henry. I promised his mother faithfully, that I would return with her son alive, or, if he were to fall, that I would bring back his corpse. Will you let me—I beg you to let me go and rescue it. The dogs cannot be far off."

Sir Henry looked rather taken aback by this request, and seemed to think it singular.

"But, my dear sir, much as I admire your courage—and I am sure I wish you were one of us—you cannot do this alone, you know."

"Alone, no, indeed. But I know many of the men would volunteer to go with me. They will all be mad when they know what those fellows have done. Sir Henry, I implore you to let me go. I shall never know another day's peace, if you do not. I shall have broken my word, and be disgraced for ever."

Sir Henry bent forward and consulted with some of the officers of his staff. They were all much distressed at the intelligence Aston had brought, and respected his grief. The major part were inclined to accede to Leonard's request, and at length Sir Henry, turning towards him, said—

"Mr. Aston, although, perhaps, somewhat out of rule, yet I have so high an opinion of your prudence and discretion, that I think I may allow you to go and reconnoitre, provided you can get fifty men on horseback to accompany you. Remember, sir, I rely upon your judgment."

Leonard scarcely stayed to hear the conclusion, and with

a few words of thanks, was soon on horseback again, and in the midst of Swansea's regiment. The news had not yet reached them, but they soon saw that something strange was on foot, and pressed round to hear.

"Which of you, my men, know Lieutenant Swansea?"

"I did; and I, and I," responded from all parts.

"He was the kindest and best man here; he was the first to-day in yonder camp, and now those rascally Sikhs have not only killed him, but carried off his body. Will you let this be done, men? Will you let your young officer be mutilated by those heathens?"

"No, that we won't," is shouted.

"I knew I was sure of you," is the response. "Well, listen to me now. I promised to take him home alive or dead, and now I mean to carry off his body or die in the attempt. Sir Henry Dundas lets me take fifty men; who will go with me?"

Hands are held up, and the men come thronging up to where he is. Swansea was the darling of his regiment, and beloved by his men. Two or three times the required number offer their services, and struggle to be chosen first. But there is little time for selection, and Leonard hastily takes the fifty nearest, who hasten at once to prepare themselves for the pursuit. One of them had been near him when he fell, and had marked the direction in which the Sikhs had retreated. In a very short time the whole party were on their way, under the guidance of two of the most experienced in the country. Their route lay naturally across the battle field, along by that camp which had been so hardly won and fiercely contested. Bodies of men were moving over the plain, busily engaged in removing the dead and wounded, whose cries for water were loud and frequent. But Leonard's thoughts were far too busily occupied to feel for these as at any other time he would have done. Silent, abstracted, and gloomy, he rode a little in advance of the company, and the men, respecting his grief, did not attempt to rouse or disturb him. After some time, the guide halted, and pointed out a dark mass in the distance, not far from the bank of the river, and under a large clump of trees.

"There they are, sir," said he, to Leonard, and accord-

ingly after a pause of some minutes, in which he ascertained that their retreat was entirely cut off by the deep and rapid stream in their rear, he decided that they should advance slowly, until within a certain distance, and then at once make for the tent of the captain of the band, before which, as they seemed preparing to encamp, the body of him they sought would most probably be found. This plan met with the approbation of all the volunteers, and they once more proceeded forward at a brisk pace. The enemy had not sufficiently recovered from the alarm and hurry of defeat, to keep very careful watch; and from the fact of the pursuit having been quickly stopped by the wary English general, they hoped to rest in safety, at least for that night, which was now drawing on.

But they were disappointed. Vengeance was nearer at hand than they believed. The brave band of volunteers came on without attracting their notice, and the first thing which informed them of the assault which assailed them, was the "hurrah" of the English, as they dashed in upon them, and cut down all who attempted opposition. Right and left fell their blows, again and again, as the firmly closed rank charged upon the frightened Sikhs. Leonard was half wild with grief, anger, and excitement; more fell by his hand than by any other round him. In vain they tried to rally, in vain muskets, spears, weapons of all kinds, were brought to bear against him. Man after man went down before him, headless, maimed, or disabled. One in desperation, clung on fiercely to his charger and tried to stab the generous animal; one blow from the avenging sword, shattered his arm and he dropped to the ground, but yet grasped the heel of Leonard's boot, in which way he was dragged for yards, before he finally relaxed his hold in death. All this time, Leonard's eye had been kept steadily fixed on one object, which he unwaveringly pursued, a brilliant tent, which he knew must be the object of his search. He pointed it out to the foldiers at his side, and plunging the spurs deep into the side of his reeking charger, galloped madly on, trampling under foot all who attempted to oppose him. He seemed to bear a charmed life—spears flew past him but touched him not—muskets were aimed at him,

but on he kept in his course unharmed, seeming to gather fresh energy from the opposition he met with. He had reckoned rightly. His conjectures were too true. There, in front of the central tent, exposed upon a spear, he saw the body of the young man he had loved so well. The sight inflamed him to yet greater exertions, and with a shout of fury, which was responded to by all the band, he dashed towards it. By this time the enemy had somewhat recovered from their panic, and seeing the small numbers of those who had so unexpectedly attacked them, they began to rally and gather courage. A stand was made over the dead body, and they fought like wolves in winter time over their prey. But the horses of the little body gave them a great advantage, which combined, with the unprepared state of the enemy, more than compensated for the paucity of their force. Again and again did the enemy gather and rally. Though several had fallen around him, yet Leonard saw that by a rapid movement he might affect his object. Making his horse wheel and plunge, he cleared a space, and then striking out on every side he reached the goal of his desires, the body of his friend. In one minute he had flung himself off his horse, placed the body reverentially across it, and remounted. Then his voice rang out loud and clear, as he ordered his men to retreat. It was hard work and many a dusky warrior bit the dust as the infuriated horses plunged and galloped back. In good order, but at a fearful speed they fled, a flight now rendered necessary from the hundreds of Sikhs who came thronging up to rescue their prey. But valour and right conquered, the Sikhs were afraid of bringing on a general attack if they continued the pursuit too far. One by one they dropped off, until the victors were allowed to pursue their course unmolested to the camp. Fifty had left, but thirty-five returned, dusty, jaded, and even wounded, but happy in their victory. Foremost among them rode Leonard, with his sacred burden resting before him, conscious of having fulfilled his task. But his overstrained nerves bore him no farther, and as he entered the lines he reeled and fell from his horse insensible from fatigue, heat, and loss of blood. That same night he was laid low with brain fever, and his life despaired of.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

SOME months had passed since the events recorded in the last chapter, and time had dragged on wearily and gloomily with nearly all those with whom this history has to do: very wearily with Mr. Philipson, who was in daily fear of the re-appearance of Wildman and another scene of threats and extortions. As soon as his parliamentary duties allowed him, he had gone with his family to Brighton, and there endeavoured to forget his troubles and their cause. Conscience, however, would not so easily be lulled, and the precarious health of the son and heir on whom he deoted, and on whom he had built so much, gave him another cause for alarm. The medical man who had been called in, gave the most unfavourable opinion, and it seemed most unlikely that it would ever reach maturity. Edith's care of it was incessant and tender. The birth of her child had elicited all the hidden affection of her disposition, which hitherto could scarcely find a vent; and, by a not unnatural progression, her sentiments towards her husband underwent a change from actual indifference, to something which, if not love, was at least a proof of her desire to do her duty to one for whom it was difficult to feel affection. Besides this, too, it was evident that he was suffering much from some secret cause, and though she knew it to be impossible to alleviate, yet she omitted no occasion of showing sympathy towards his anxieties. Perhaps at any other time this might have had some effect upon Philipson's character—now, it was too late. His dreadful secret seemed completely to crush him, and paralyse all his energies and feelings; and haunted by

remorse every time he entered his own home, knowing as he did, that one word would bring it crashing to the ground and overwhelm him in its ruins, his only resource upon their return in the spring to town, was to bury himself in the thick of his parliamentary duties. He was constant in his attendance, and found himself continually upon committees, where his practical business-like habits rendered him very useful. He made one or two smart, clever speeches, having well prepared his subjects, and chosen those on which he knew he could bring the greatest amount of knowledge to bear. They were listened to, applauded, and Philipson pronounced a very rising man. Forbes, now in parliament again, and with almost a certainty of forming one of the cabinet, helped him not a little, being actuated not so much by the spirit of intrigue, as by a desire to please Margaret. So, to all appearances, Philipson was a prosperous man, for what can be desired more than to have your speeches listened to, your entertainments praised, and your wife admired? And Margaret? She had learnt meanwhile to "suffer and be strong." The fatal secret had sunk down deep into her heart. Not that she cared for the mere loss of wealth as regarded herself, but that she felt marked with a sense of disgrace and dishonesty, and the certainty that wealth retained under such violation of truth and justice, must have a bad end. Yet she felt herself powerless; she was no free agent. Once only had she ventured to allude to the subject to her papa, but she met with so savage a reception, that it was impossible ever to renew it. She could only pray that the sin might not be visited on the innocent, and as a prisoner of hope, sigh for deliverance. With regard to Leonard, she had struggled hard to overcome her feelings of love towards him, but she felt that though she might repress and control, to forbid them was out of her power. For weeks she had waited, half hoping that she should in some way learn the way in which her letter had been received. But no answer, no intelligence of any kind came; and after again and again pondering over every word and expression it contained, and wondering whether it had been misunderstood, she was obliged sorrowfully to dismiss the subject as beyond her.

But a painful surprise was at hand. One day she came by chance, upon his name as serving as a volunteer in India, under Sir Henry Dundas, and being present in some slight engagement where he had distinguished himself. As all correspondence with Northmoor had been forbidden, she had heard nothing of his having left Gaunt House, and the blow was consequently sudden and severe. For a long time she accused herself of having by her refusal, driven him abroad and placed his life in jeopardy. But reflection at length showed her that she was not really responsible for this, however she might regret it. Still her anxiety and misery was very great. The more so, as she was by the nature of the case utterly isolated from sympathy and cut off from all sources of intelligence of him she loved so well. It was not wonderful that she pined and wasted, or that her languor and weakness became daily more apparent, compelled as she was to take a continual part in all the gaieties which were ever going on, to laugh, and talk, and seem at ease, when her heart was almost dead within her, under pressure of a double load of care. Edith regarded her state with unfeigned alarm and sorrow. She was utterly at a loss to account for the change in Margaret's sunny, joyous, open disposition, and in the pale, mournful, almost stern woman before her, could trace no resemblance to the confiding, loving girl, who had greeted her new mamma so warmly, or so cheered her with her affectionate caresses and intercourse. Affectionate she still was, and lavish in her care and attentions to her and her little, sickly, baby brother, but it seemed as if some icy spirit of reserve and sorrow had laid his hand upon her and frozen up all life and heart within. She moved more like an automaton than a human being, and seemed almost to have lost all feeling, save that of duty, which she was resolved to go through. Still to all inquiries and solicitations, she always answered that nothing was the matter with her, and so Edith was fain to attribute it to sympathy with the gloomy oppression under which her father laboured, or else regret at the daily increasing illness of her little brother.

Things were in this state, when about the beginning of

March, the cold winds being unusually keen, little Algernon, so called after Viscount Edginton, his grandfather, was attacked by a violent fit of cough, which threatened to put an end to his feeble spark of existence. His father's distress was great. He would sit for hours by the cot in which the child reposed, and, indeed, spent there, nearly all the time which his parliamentary duties left vacant. Doctor after doctor was consulted in vain: all looked grave and declared that there was no chance of the child's feeble constitution enduring such continued and violent attacks. It *might*, perhaps, ride over this, but as to its growing up, that was out of the question.

One evening, as the unhappy Philipson was sitting by himself in the library, pondering over the misery of his position, and the trouble which his unjust wealth had brought upon him, a servant entered to announce a gentleman who was desirous of seeing him. The man was new to his place, or he would not have transgressed his master's orders to exclude all comers: but the mischief was done, and with an angry exclamation, he told the servant to show him in at once. In a minute after, Mr. Widdman was ushered into the room, and seated himself at once, immediately opposite his victim. Widdman was a strange example of the change which sudden acquisition of wealth works in all those not fortified by sound moral principles. We have seen him pass the best part of his life with no other views than those of an antiquarian or collector of curiosities. He cared neither for society nor pleasure: literature was almost a dead letter; his profession he hated, and all amusements despised. His income formerly had been too small to allow him to board it as the inward bent of his mind would have led him to do: a miser of two or three hundred a-year was absurd, and to his hoarding propensities devoted themselves in the accumulation of curiosities, which certainly made rather more show. But when, by virtue of his recent influence over Philipson, he had become master of one thousand a-year, with the power of accumulating extending even more than the true miser-spirt showed lack. He did not indulge as

many would have done, in luxury, display, extravagance; no, he had lived too long in solitude and quiet to care for that. But all his efforts were turned to the accumulation and increase of wealth, already more than sufficient for him. He allowed himself to dabble in more than one railway and joint stock company of questionable respectability and character: by mortgages, loans at high interest, and such other plans, he "made haste to become rich," and in many other ways proved the truth of a certain wife, second-hand quotation in the grammar, which most boys have whipped into them in order that they may forget it in after life. He was continually tempted, and, as we have seen, occasionally led to abuse his power over Philipson, by extorting large sums of money from him beyond his stipulated income. There was something irresistibly alluring in the idea, that one or two words from him would raise up a cheque to the amount required; and as he despised his victim too much to give him credit for courage enough to turn again and rend him, his power appeared not only great but inexhaustible. It was on one of these expeditions that he had come. He was desirous of embarking a large sum on a new and profitable speculation, and was determined that the funds necessary for this purpose should come from the wretched man before him. Like a ghost, then, he waited for the first question to be put to him; nor did he wait long.

"Why are you come again?" said Philipson, sulkily raising his head, "you might have timed your visit better. Don't you know that there is trouble in this house?"

"With respect to that, it seems that my visits are never likely to be welcome, so that the time of paying them can matter little. I suppose the trouble, whatever it may be, will not prevent us from transacting a little business?"

"I don't see what business you can have with me?"

"Indeed? I should have thought you might have guessed it. It is on a subject about which we have spoken before—money—I want some more."

"How dare you come to me and demand it in that way?" said Philipson, fiercely. "You know our agreement: I have always kept to my part of it. Your salary—and I am sure

one thousand a-year is large enough—has been paid regularly: what do you expect for keeping this infernal secret? Do you want to ruin me?"

"No, certainly not," answered the other, coolly, "that would not suit me. What you say is quite true about my salary—except about its being large enough."

"It was what you agreed to."

"Certainly, I was silly enough to agree to that sum, and now you taunt me with my folly. Well, I do *not* find it enough now, and therefore I must avail myself of all opportunities of increasing it. The question for you is, whether you consider twenty thousand worth purchasing by these occasional subsidies? You know I can easily go to Mr. Keightley."

"Wildman, you are a most consummate villain. Take care, though, lest you try me too far. A desperate man will do much."

"I don't know what a desperate man might do, but I know what a coward will not do. Come, Philipson, don't talk nonsense. You know I mean what I say, and this time I say that I must have quite four thousand. If you'll give me that, I promise not to trouble you for a year to come. Consider it."

Philipson made no reply. Wildman had urged him almost too far, and he felt inclined to repel and shake off his yoke for ever. His mind ran over a bright prospect of freedom, of noble self-sacrifice and restitution, of approving conscience, and the removal of certain unpleasant stings of remorse which long had haunted him. He should again be an honest man; the little that he should have, would be, in truth, his own. They could retire abroad, and live cheaply at Brussels, Ghent, Bruges, or some other place where they were not known. Visions of rural felicity, of domestic bliss, and simple happiness came thick upon him, but then that awful bugbear, the world and its comments, rose up and clouded the whole prospect. Philipson the member, Philipson the county man, Philipson, who, with his aristocratic connections, might one day hope to gain at least a baronetcy for his services. Sir Edward Philipson retire from

the world upon a wretched pittance, and live in beggarly obscurity! Oh, what a struggle was it—how hard to decide. But at length he looked up, and said in cold and measured tones—

“You are mistaken if you think that so large a sum can be obtained at a moment’s notice. It is quite impossible for me to remove this sum from my banker’s now, and you must give me some time—a week will do. At the end of that time I will send for you, and you can have the money, not before.”

He spoke so decidedly and sternly, that Wildman did not care to prolong the discussion, and gave his consent to the proposition. Scarcely had the door closed behind him, when a servant came running in to summon Philipson to the nursery. The child’s illness had taken a sudden and alarming turn—it lay in its little cot gasping and fighting for each breath, while the loud rattle in its throat sounded horrible. Edith was there on her knees beside her little one, looking on in speechless agony at her utter inability to afford any assistance, and Margaret hung over her whispering comfort and sympathies. Philipson put aside the crowd of frightened and useless nurses, and took his place beside the child. But it was too late. Its miserable thread of existence was run and snapped, and with one faint smile and sigh, the poor little child was at length removed from its misery to a happier world. Bitter was his grief at the overthrow of all his fondest hopes. His son and heir had been the dearest object of his love; he had calculated so much upon its manhood and the delights of seeing his own name perpetuated in that estate of which he was so proud. And now all was over. He had striven in vain. After all, Margaret, that daughter whom he disliked so much, would inherit his wealth; he had submitted to Wildman’s tyranny in vain, if this was to be the result. At length he began to see the utter emptiness of the toils of his whole life, and as he descended to the solitude of the study, there to conceal his grief, he was obliged to confess, that all was vanity and vexation of spirit.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A TILE FROM THE INFERNAL PAVEMENT.

ALL was over. The poor little baby had been committed to the grave with all imaginable pomp and ceremony, and the unhappy father returned home, there in solitude to add somewhat to the mosaic of that floor which is said to be paved with good intentions. So bitterly did he feel his loss, that he at length came to the resolution that he would see Keightley, and throw himself on his mercy, by confessing his fraud, and resigning the property which he had held illegally. He repeated his resolve again and again to himself, as though he feared the strength of his own will; and as an incentive to carry it out, tried to depict to himself the keen disappointment and chagrin of Wildman, when he should find himself so unexpectedly outwitted and duped. Come what might, he determined that the very next day he would see Keightley, and confess all before Wildman's visit, so that then he might confront him as a free and honest man. To remind himself of that, he wrote, though he did not actually post a letter to Mr. Keightley asking for an interview, and this he left on the study table. This done, he resolved to close his eyes to all possible consequences, and devote the time which remained to him before the fatal day came, to the fulfilment of his ordinary duties and the settlement of various matters which it was desirable to have arranged. He shut himself up, scarcely eating or drinking, and passed hour after hour in tearing up and burning, or docketing files of papers and letters.

On the third day after the funeral, he received a note from one of the Ministers, reminding him of an engagement to

bring forward an important bill relative to mercantile matters, which it was desirable not to delay. Thankful for something which might call off his thoughts from the gloomy subjects on which they were involuntarily dwelling, he at once acceded to the request, and promised to fulfil his pledge. The rest of the day was passed in preparing for the speech he intended to make that night, and when at length he rose from his fatiguing task, he was conscious of a feeling of lassitude and faintness which he attributed to over application. But he could not think of forfeiting his engagement and losing the opportunity of making, what he felt must be his last speech. Before he left his own house, he entered the drawing-room to give some directions to Edith and Margaret, who were there, and held—a rare thing for him—a few minutes general conversation with them, his manner being kinder and gentler than usual. After charging them not to wait for him, as he was sure to be late, he left them, and a few minutes after his carriage was heard rolling off on its way to Westminster. The subject on which he was about to speak was one of considerable interest and importance, and the house was very full. The stranger's gallery was crowded, and many of the peers were to be seen among the auditors. There was that general hum and subdued buzz of conversation, which denotes the expectation of something more than usually exciting, and the frequent journeys to and fro of the "whippers in," showed that a great party struggle was at hand. There were several motions to come on before the event of the evening, and the interval was passed generally in speculations upon the fate of the approaching debate.

"Government will have a majority of at least twenty: I have it from the best authority," remarked a very young member to his neighbour.

"No such thing," was the answer, "it is impossible for them to carry it; the sense of the country is clean against them. They are certain to be beaten."

"And will they resign?" asked the little placeman, anxiously.

"Of course. Not a doubt about it. *You* need not fear, you

know; it is only those of any importance who will go out. Look there, there comes Philipson. How white he looks—nervous I should think. By the bye, how came your chief to put this bill in such hands? I can't think why you all make such a fuss about him. He isn't so very much of a speaker, nor so very rich—at least A., and B., and C. have twice as much; then he's no birth, or particular interest."

"Ah," answers the other, with a sapient head-shake, "there are reasons, or it would not be done. Hush, there he is just going to begin."

So it was. Philipson began, in tones at first low and nervous, but as he gathered courage and energy, increasing in power and spirit. He really spoke well, and to-night being much excited, unusually well and powerfully. Every now and then, however, he paused, and put his hand to his side as if in pain, and at last sent for and eagerly drank a glass of water.

"What is the matter with him," said one of those who had spoken before. "Oh, drinking water, I see. Ha, there he is on again. Well, I must acknowledge he speaks well, better than usual. I wish old B. would take his thick head out the way—I can't see. Hallo! what's that? what a remarkable sound!"

It *was* rather a remarkable sound, truly—simply that of a man falling down in a fit. Philipson had paused, put his hand to his head, and then fallen forward heavily upon the floor of the House. What a noise and confusion ensues! How members of all political shades press round, and vie with each other in assisting, and obstructing the air. A noble Viscount raises him, a Baronet holds his head, several Honorables pick up his hat and papers. Oh, Mr. Philipson, you must, indeed, be a bad case, or you would revive at this! "Take him to the lobby"—"Leave him still," "Lift him up"—"Let him lie flat—you'll kill him if you move him." Such are the cries which resound. But at length he is raised, carried out and deposited upon a couch, while a medical man is sent for. What an awful green-gray pallor upon his face, how deadly cold his hand, how drawn his face and mouth! Ah, see, he opens his eyes for a moment—his lips move—what is it he whispers ere they close for ever? "Too late!" He is dead.

Yes, wonder my lords and gentlemen as you may, but you will never know the meaning of those two words, "Too late." I do not know any words in the whole range of language more awful. "Too late," what a history they tell of ruined hopes, broken resolutions, wasted time. What a knell they sound for the past, the irrevocable past; and oh! what a despairing cry to enter upon the future with. Yes, Edward Philipson, it is too late, you have gone to a world where resolutions count but little, actions very much. "I would have done," prevails not against "I have." Yes, wonder, my lords and gentlemen as you will, but none of you will ever know the real meaning of those two words, except, perhaps, in your own cases. Come, curtain drop upon this scene, one character has done his part; take him away and make room for the next, let us change the scene and shift the puppets.

In spite of Philipson's injunctions, Margaret and Edith continued to sit up for his return. They had both been surprised and alarmed at his manner and appearance, and both were filled with a similar apprehension of evil. A presentiment that something was about to happen had taken possession of them in a strange and unaccountable manner, and they sat in almost gloomy silence. Eleven o'clock struck, and the sound of the neighbouring chimes had scarce died away, when a carriage drove up and stopped at the door. "Thank goodness, here's papa," said Margaret, "I cannot tell you how nervous I felt."

"So did I, dearest, but I scarcely liked to confess it. How odd that he should ring, instead of letting himself in. Hark, whose voice is that, Margaret, it is some stranger and not Edward?"

"Perhaps he has brought some one home with him," said Margaret, trying to conceal her now renewed fears. At that moment a servant came up with rather a scared face, and said that a gentleman wished to speak with the ladies immediately. The business was of great importance. Almost while he spoke, a gentleman of aristocratic appearance entered the room and at once advanced to Mrs. Philipson, who leant, pale as death, against the marble chimney piece.

"Pardon my intrusion, I beg," he began, "but my business is of such importance as to have made me forget conventional laws. Mr. Philipson, it is my painful duty to tell you, is ill, very ill. Pray do not be alarmed. Perhaps," as he paused and hesitated, evidently at a loss how to tell the whole truth, Margaret came forward and said firmly, "Do not trifle with us, we are able to hear the real truth, and it is best. My father is dead?"

"I grieve to say such is the case." Scarcely had the words been uttered, than with a faint cry Edith swooned, and it was some time before the united exertions of Margaret and Mr. Stanesby the bearer of the tidings, were able to recover her. When she came to, however, the accustomed composure and decision of her character returned, and feeling her exhaustion she allowed herself to be led quietly to her own room, while Margaret went below to receive Douglas Forbes, who now arrived to superintend the necessary arrangements.

It was some time before Margaret was actually able to understand what had happened. She appeared stunned, and went about with dry eyes and stony face, giving various directions in a hard, mechanical voice and manner, which would, to a stranger, have worn the look of indifference. It was only at length when she had gazed upon the pallid corpse of him who, whether bad or good, still *was* her father, that a few warm drops came stealing down, precursors of a violent flood of tears, which seemed to refresh, and ease her of a heavy burden. After a while she was again able to think and consider both for past and future; to take up thread by thread the tangled web of her existence, and reflect upon the line of duty she must pursue. She found herself the sole depositor of her father's secret, and with her it rested to rescue his name from the disgrace which she felt Wildman had it in his power to bring upon it. There appeared nothing to prevent him from avowing her father's duplicity, now that nothing more could be extorted from him, and the consequences of such an act were enough to fill her with dismay. As far as her own desires were concerned, she felt most anxious immediately to renounce their ill-gotten wealth

to its rightful owner, and wipe off the disgrace by prompt restitution. But then two things seemed to fetter her. Edith must be consulted about the resignation of what she was so nearly concerned in, and how could she effect this and yet save her father's name. She turned, and thought over these two points until her mind seemed on the point of utter failure. Never was an act of honesty beset with so many and conflicting difficulties, and never, perhaps, had so trying a duty fallen upon so young a girl. Night after night she would lie awake, thinking over various plans and ideas, until she actually accused herself of heartlessness in allowing them to occupy her mind under her recent loss. But she could not but acknowledge to herself, that she had always striven to the utmost to do her duty to her poor father, whose faults she tried to forget in the generous attempt to magnify the few acts of kindness he had ever shown her. She felt deeply thankful for the words of careless conversation which had fallen from him before he left them for the last time, and tried to recal and dwell upon them to the exclusion of all less pleasant points of memory. Her mind was inexpressibly tranquillised and fortified by the accidental discovery of Philipson's letter to Keightley. While looking round the study for a certain missing paper, she came upon the note, and after some reflection, remembered that she had heard the name mentioned by Wildman, as that of the rightful heir. For a moment she paused, pondering in her mind the propriety of her opening a letter addressed to a perfect stranger; but reflection convinced her of the necessity of the act under the circumstances, and she broke the seal. The note, in a few words, informed Cyril Keightley that the writer had communications of great importance to make, and appointed the very day on which the funeral was now to take place for the interview. There could be no doubt of her father's intention in thus writing, and Margaret burst into tears of most sincere joy at thus discovering the change in his sentiments, and his determination to atone for the evil he had been led to commit. Her task was now robbed of half its difficulty, when she found that she was only about to fulfil the wishes of her father. She could

confront Wildman boldly and fearlessly, now that she had this testimony to the repentance of her father, and she resolved that the struggle with him, now that the funeral was over, should no longer be delayed. The sooner they were liberated from their horribly false condition, the better—the sooner atonement for the past was made, the more peaceful the prospect of the future. But first Edith must be told; that was absolutely necessary, and yet she shrank from it, shuddering at being the one to reveal her father's faults to his wife. She delayed as long as she possibly could, but every time she came upon any article that had belonged to her father, it seemed to convey such a silent reproach, that she could not endure it any longer, and rebuking herself for her cowardice, she went one day straight to Edith to make her revelation. She scarcely knew how to begin, when, to her delight, Edith took the initiative by asking in her kindest voice, "What plans Margaret had formed for the future." Here was the golden opportunity. So she began, though in rather a trembling voice. "It was rather about that, mamma, that I came to speak. I fear you must have thought me altered and cold the last few months, more reserved, I mean, and perhaps not in such good spirits. Did you think me unkind, mamma, or that I had forgotten to love you?"

"No indeed, my dear, I thought no such thing. But I could see that you had some great trouble and grief which was very heavy upon you, and as you did not tell me, I feared it was either a secret or something in which I could not help you. But I have felt for you, whatever it was."

"Dear mamma, I knew you would. You were right indeed. For I have had a heavy burden upon me, and one which, until now, I was unable to tell you. But now the time is come when you must hear all, though I scarcely know how to tell you. It seems so dreadful. Mamma, should you be very shocked were I to tell you we were very poor, I mean that we shall have very little—that what we now have may be taken away from us, and in fact, belongs to another?" She paused and looked up anxiously at Edith. Her face was very pale, but her voice had no tremor in it

as she said steadily, "Perhaps once I should have been dismayed at this, but I seem to care very little now. Go on, dear, and tell me what you mean by this."

"Ah, now comes the worst. How can I tell it. Mamma, we are not the rightful possessors of poor papa's fortune, it all belongs to another, who can claim it from us."

Margaret was a sad little blunderer. Edith looked steadily at her, and said, "Margaret, you are keeping something back. I know the worst is to come, but I am able to bear it, whatever it may be. Let me hear."

Reassured by this, Margaret began again.

"Poor papa's fortune was left him by an old cousin whom he had never seen or even heard of. With it, you know, he bought all the lands about Margrove, and added them to the estate. Besides this, the estate of Stoke Damerel came from the same source. But another and a later will has been found by accident since papa came into all this, and here he is no longer heir. All goes to a Mr. Keightley—Cyril Keightley. This was discovered more than a year ago, and—"

"Margaret, tell me one thing—did your father know of it and conceal it? tell me truly."

"He did, mamma."

There was a dead silence, while Edith covered her face in her hands; at length she looked up, and said through her quiet tears, "It must have been a great trial, Margaret, dearest; we never have been so tried, or we know not what we might have done. Pray heaven it may be forgiven him."

Margaret gave her a passionate kiss and exclaimed, "Oh, why did I so dread telling you. I ought to have known you better. Dearest mother, I did so fear you would be shocked."

"Grieved I am, dearest, but God forbid that I should judge or condemn my husband. I fear that I was far from being a good wife to him, but I will not, cannot say one word against him now."

"Well, mamma, you must hear the end. This will was found by a lawyer, a Mr. Wildman, a very hard, cruel

person, and by showing it to poor papa, and threatening to give it up to Mr. Keightley, he succeeded in frightening him into making him a regular allowance to keep his secret. But he soon was not content with this, and tried to extort large sums from him whenever he wanted them. It was one of these interviews with papa, that I overheard by chance, and so became acquainted with this dreadful business. I begged and entreated papa, as soon as I knew all, to free himself from that wretched man's power, by giving up all at once. But he would not hear of it then, and forbade me the subject. So I have been obliged to try and conceal what I suffered, and let no one know the truth. That was why I must have seemed so strange and reserved to you, but I really longed to let you know all, and yet dared not. But the thing is, what is to be done now? How are we to act? Give up, of course we must, but how, without dragging forward poor papa's concealment?"

Edith pondered for a few minutes, and then suddenly asked, "But where is this will? Did your papa have it?"

"No, that was Wildman's cunning. He would never give it up, but retained it in his own hands. But look here, mamma, I have kept the ray of comfort to the last. I found this note of poor papa's, written the very day that he died, and I think there can be no doubt but that he really intended to resign all. Armed with this, I should not be afraid to meet Mr. Keightley. We must trust to his generosity to keep our secret."

"True, my dear, all must be told him. But he is not the one I fear. It is this lawyer, this Mr. Wildman you speak of. How will he receive the news of your intended resignation?—I call it yours, because you know it is yours entirely. I should not suffer, for my own private fortune, besides the original estate of Margrove, which is nearly eight hundred a-year, was settled on me, and cannot be touched in any case, so the merit is yours. Are you not afraid that he will try and threaten to expose poor Edward's concealment of this will, and so carry favor with Keightley, at the cost of your father's name?"

"No, mamma, I do not fear that in the least. He does

not know that any one, besides himself, is aware of all this, and I expect when he finds that I have overheard all, and am able, aye, and willing too, to bear witness against him; when he sees that he cannot blast poor papa's name without ruining himself also, and without being made to restore the thousands he extorted from his victim, I think that he will consent to my giving up what we have no longer the right to keep, and reinstating Mr. Keightley, because what good will the will be of to him then? in fact, it will even bear witness against him."

"Dear child, how you must have thought all this out."

"Yes, indeed, mamma, I have thought it all over, night after night, and wondered what was best to do, until I felt nearly wild. But now I think I see my way clearly. But what do you think, yourself, mamma?"

"I agree with all you have said, entirely, Margaret dear, but as I told you I have no voice in this matter. You are the only one to suffer, not that you shall, however, as far as I can help. My new home, wherever it may be, will be yours for ever, and perhaps, one reason that I care less for the loss of this money, is on account of the opportunity it will give for uniting us even more closely, and making us even more like mother and daughter. Dearest girl, you must come now and live with me."

"Do not think me ungrateful if I say this is impossible, my dear, kind mother. But I fear it must not be. You know my two poor aunts have, I think, a claim upon me. They were most kind to me when I was all alone and friendless, and I know they would dearly love to have me back again for the few years they can have to live. Do you not think I ought to go to them, mamma?"

"It is very hard for me to have to say 'yes.' But you are far less selfish than I am. I had forgotten them in the anticipated pleasure of my dear Margaret's company. No, you are right, my dear, you knew them first, and your first duty should be to them. But do not forget that you have a step-mother in name, but mother in heart, always ready to receive and befriend you whenever necessary; do not forget, dear child, that whether the world smile or frown

upon you, I shall ever be the same towards you. But now, dear, how is this difficult business to be settled? you cannot do it, you know."

"Indeed I can, mamma, and will, if you will allow it. I feel strong as a lion, at the thought of meeting that vile man, who tempted and so cruelly used my poor father. No, leave him to me, I do not fear him in the least, and so he will find."

Edith expostulated and wanted Douglas called in, but Margaret was firm as a rock not to hear of this, and so at length it was decided that she should encounter Mr. Wildman the next day. She wrote and despatched to his residence, a note requesting an interview, and then resolutely collected all her strength of mind for the contest which must ensue. She succeeded nobly, for when Wildman's name was announced, she was able to meet him with as brave and unquailing face, as though she knew not what fear meant. Edith begged to be present, but this Margaret objected to so strenuously, as likely to make her nervous, that she at length withdrew from her request, and suffered her to go alone. Wildman awaited her with what may be called confident curiosity. Although entirely unaware of the purpose for which he had been summoned, he so little expected its real nature, that he secretly intended to take advantage of this opportunity of revealing the second will to Margaret, and either propose to her that she should marry him as the price of its destruction; or should he find her obstinate in refusal, at once make his peace with Keightley by a prompt surrender, supported by some forged tale, which, as he imagined, it was out of any one's power to deny or contradict. He was a little awed at the cold, stern face of that young girl, as she swept into the room in her black garments, which increased the pallor of her face. There was an expression on that countenance he did not like, and he inwardly resolved that if she became Mrs. Wildman, it should be altered. With a cold bow, and an entire neglect of his proffered hand, Margaret advanced to the table on the other side of which he was standing, and at once began.

"Mr. Wildman, you had some dealings with my father, I believe?"

"All right!" thought the lawyer, so he answered blandly, "I had the honor to be his confidential and legal adviser, as well as the agent for the large property which he was so well fitted to enjoy; and very much do I regret the melancholy circumstance which has parted us."

"I did not mean dealings in that sense, sir. I alluded to certain representations and proposals of yours, by which you induced my father to join with you in the concealment of a will now in your possession, whereby all his property was transferred to Mr. Keightley."

She shook all over as she said this, and it seemed to her as though all the blood in her body had flown to her forehead. But she stood firm, nevertheless, and kept her eyes fixed upon her opponent's face. He involuntarily grew very pale; he had not expected this, and was utterly taken by surprise. But he mentally ran over all the chances and combinations which might turn up, and decided that she was about to offer him terms for still concealing the secret. Her manner was stern, it was true, but perhaps she was excited and nervous.

"Oh, you have become acquainted with that, have you? Well, that certainly, was not included in my bargain with your deceased father, but I suppose it was foresight on his part. Well, you will not find me hard to deal with, especially if you agree to a certain plan of mine. You want to arrange about keeping the secret?"

"Indeed you are utterly mistaken," cried Margaret, thoroughly aroused by his cool impudence. "My business with you is of quite another kind. It is to advise you to give up that will to me before I go to Mr. Keightley to resign all to him, which is my intention."

Wildman almost staggered with astonishment. *This* was a combination which he had not deemed possible. The idea of twenty thousand a-year being resigned voluntarily by any one, had never entered his head, far less by one of a sex which he so thoroughly despised; but though surprised and a little alarmed, he would not show it.

"Softly, young lady," he began. "It is very easy and fine to talk about 'advising' and 'resigning,' but I would have you look to consequences. Have you yet considered, that by doing the absurdity you talk of, you would be utterly ruining your father's name, and proclaiming him a felon, besides making yourself a beggar. You must be out of your senses to talk as you do, and to *me*, who have the power of doing all this. Come, come, be reasonable."

"I will tell you what I have thought of, Mr. Wildman, and what I think you have forgotten. You have joined in conspiring to conceal the will, and as punishment cannot fall on the dead, it will on the living. You called my father a felon, remember *you* are one also."

"Where is the witness?" sneered Wildman.

"Here," said Margaret, boldly. "Let me tell you that I know all without reserve. I one day overheard a conversation which you had with my poor father, and I know and can bear witness to the share you had. Listen to me, Mr. Wildman. You think I am a poor, silly, romantic girl, and that I shall not do as I say: I tell you I *will*—and that forthwith—yes, though it cost me my very life. I will undo the mischief you have caused, at least I will try my all to repair my father's error, or crime, rather; and I do most certainly tell you that I will go to-morrow—nay, this very day to Mr. Keightley, and tell him of this will, and the whole history attached to it. That he will pardon my poor father's part, I am as sure as I am that he will punish you. I would not retain this vile wealth an hour—no, not if I must starve without it. Mr. Wildman, you have to do with one who is resolved—so look to it."

It was as if a hare had turned against a wolf. He stood utterly aghast and overcome by the vehemence and determination of the slight girl before him, and gazed at her for a moment in mute astonishment. He began to feel something like fear, for his strongest weapon, the dread he hoped to inspire in her by threatening her father's name, had utterly failed. What was to be done?

"Miss Philipson," he commenced, "you are, not unnaturally, excited, but I can pardon any acrimony in your

expressions, from the surprise attendant upon the discovery you have made. Now listen to me. It is quite useless to deny the share I have had in this business—why should I to you? But remember at the same time, it is, if you push it to a point, only your word against mine. Now, you must see, I am safe. I can either burn this will, and so destroy all evidence against me, or I can, by anticipating your revelation to Keightley, prejudice him against your story. Now, be advised, make friends with me, and continue in your wealth. I do not wish to deprive you of it.”

“In the first case you speak of I should indeed be left in possession, but then my first act would be to resign, and so involve you; in the second, you must be aware that my story could not but be far the most probable to Mr. Keightley, exposing your duplicity as it would. Listen to me, now, and what I offer. This money, I have told you, shall be resigned, but one term I can offer you. If you will give up this will to me at once, I will promise never to mention your name or connection with my father to Mr. Keightley or any one else, and I will secure you from blame. This is the only condition I can offer you conscientiously, and this, if you accept it, I will keep sincerely. If you refuse, you know what will follow, your disgrace and ruin which you cannot avert.”

Wildman reflected in silence. The game had slipped completely out of his hands, and he could not help himself. He was at the mercy of that grave, pale girl, to whom he had intended to offer conditions and dictate agreements. He saw that his part was concluded, and that his only chance of safety was to consent. At length he said, half sullenly—

“How am I to be sure of this? what will be my security that you don’t inform against me also?”

“If you cannot trust my word, I will take any oath you please,” replied Margaret, with disgust.

“Do so, then,” and he dictated the words. Scarcely had she complied, when he took the precious will from his breast-pocket and hurled it on the table, saying—

“Take it, and may a curse go with it. I wish it may

injure all who had to do with it. I would have made you rich and prosperous, but since you are fool enough to prefer becoming a beggar, do so. I have nothing more to do with it. Your father, coward and fool as he was, knew better than that, and you would do well to follow his example."

"My father, sir," retorted Margaret, white with indignation, "lived to see the crime into which he had been led by you, and to repent it. Almost his last act was to take steps towards resigning this property, and in so doing, I *am* following his example."

She turned from him as she spoke, with such a generous scorn and contempt for him, as to awe even the callous lawyer, who could not endure her glance. The rejoinder he commenced died on his lips—his courage utterly failed him, and feeling himself baffled, overcome, and despised by a girl, he left the room in silence, the room and the house, never to enter again. His magic wand was broken, his influence gone; he had been encountered and vanquished, and henceforth might return to his former level. What his future life was, matters not. Perhaps he thrived and rose to worldly eminence: rascals as great have done so. Perhaps he lived or starved in poverty, having speculated down his fortune—it matters not. His mind was ever the same, and with such an inward enemy, how could he be happy. Thus Margaret, pale but victorious, was left mistress of the battle field, "faint, yet pursuing."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A FAMILY PICTURE.

A WET, dreary afternoon in April, is the time of all others, when one most enjoys a bright, blazing fire, and yet there is none in the little back room into which I am about to take you. It is rather dismal, this said little back room—dismal and uncomfortable, for there is a somewhat close smell of baked mutton, which has, evidently, formed the dinner, half-an-hour previously; and the windows are streaming with wet, and the old horsehair furniture looks worn and mighty hard, and the carpet is darned, and there are no flowers or pleasant ornaments to add some air of grace and elegance; altogether, it is, as I said, a dismal room. But there are three persons in it, young persons all, who are enough, in themselves, to atone even for a black hole of Calcutta. Not that they are so wonderfully handsome—I have seen many with far greater pretensions to beauty—but there is an amount of character and originality in their faces, for which one might search in vain over a half-a-dozen Almacks.

Let us examine them severally, and begin in order with the eldest. Mabel Keightley is about twenty-one, tall, slight, and graceful. Her features are straight and regular, a sweet, pale, oval face, shaded by dark brown, almost black hair, and lighted by a pair of sincere, honest, hazel eyes. But the charm of the face lies in the expression of calm and peaceful confidence which distinguishes it from the vivacity of her younger sister. It would appear impossible to disturb, or change her equanimity, and yet there is nothing of tameness or vacuity observable: on the contrary, her eyes sparkle with animation; when she smiles (and that is a

frequent habit), she displays a brilliant row of ivory teeth, which seem made for laughter, and her whole face glows and flushes with keen enjoyment. Such is Mabel Keightley, and you can see at the same moment, both that she has been, and is accustomed to distress and suffering, and that her naturally happy and cheerful temperament bears her through all unharmed, and unfouled by rebuffs and reverses. If I were ill, Mabel is just the kind of person I should like to be nursed by. Tender, thoughtful, sweet-tempered, and lively, she would bring such an atmosphere of peace and comfort to the sick room, as would infallibly banish all the tribes of fevers, agues, rheumatisms, and jaundices, yellow and black, that revel in that locality. Meantime she is seated at a little round table, engaged busily in copying some lithographic landscape. Ah, Mabel, one can see in a minute that you are poor, but thrifty and ingenious in expedients, even did your costume not reveal the fact! All the expensive colors and pigments are wanting in that simple box of yours—no Cadmium yellows, pure scarlets, ultramarines, or carmines. No—these are evidently expensive luxuries to you. But admirably have you hit upon your substitutes, and lovely are the mixed tints you have put together from your humble range of blues, and reds, and yellows. In my opinion, you ought to be invited to lecture at the South Kensington Museum, for if I mistake not, you could teach even higher things than Art, such a nature of simplicity, amiability, and content as forms a picture—aye, and a very sweet one, in itself. But who is this pacing up and down the little dismal room, with vigorous, impatient steps—I had almost said, strides, but that would have been treason in connection with the fairy little figure in question. Gertrude Keightley is the second of the prisoners I am describing—and a somewhat restless one she seems—younger than Mabel by some three years, she certainly surpasses her in beauty of feature, though not in sweetness of expression; she is short, compactly made, with microscopic hands and feet, the former of which, though at this minute red with cold, betray good birth in their faultless shape and tapering fingers; she has glowing, chestnut-brown hair, all waved in natural coils, and resolutely brushed off her face;

she has a delicate, pink complexion, flushing up now and then under excitement, into pure vermillion—just such a colour, in fact, as Mabel wants to finish her setting fun. But her face, how can I describe that which never wears the same expression for two consecutive minutes? Laughter, tears, caresses, reproaches, gravity, absurdity—all look equally well on that animated countenance, and all, more or less, visit and pass over it in the course of the day. She is very pretty, that is certain: small nose and mouth, and eyes of a color purely indescribable, and as the world would laugh were I to pronounce them emerald, I suppose I must be content with the epithet, “gray,” albeit that scarcely says all I mean. Mabel and Gertrude are dressed alike, only there is this point of difference: whereas Mabel’s costume is only remarkable for quiet tidiness and simplicity, and conveys the idea that she is ready for any work that may be required, Gertrude’s is put on with such an ineffable air of style and fashion, as to make that simple merino look as if it had come straight from Paris; besides this, too, she has added a wicked little bow of crimson, which relieves the dark gray admirably. For all this, Gertrude, I would not have you, if I could, to nurse me in illness—I cannot at all, imagine you as “a ministering angel.” Highly amusing, piquant, and delightful you certainly are, but I fear Mabel possesses all the sterling qualities. Edgar Keightley, the third, is a young man of about twenty, slight and thin, and evidently initiated into the mystery of pain. Not that he looks sickly now, but he has the air of one who has suffered at times both in mind and body. His face bears a more thoughtful cast than even Mabel’s, but, unlike hers, has not that tranquil look of trust and peace. Perhaps he has come more in contact with the world, and received a hurt in the struggle; but there is a look of over-anxiety and somewhat ascetic reserve, unusual at his age. He is not bad-looking, though, perhaps not (strictly speaking) handsome. Rather large features, dark eyes, mouth somewhat compressed, dark complexion, and brown hair, which every now and then falls over his face and causes him to toss his head back like an impatient horse. I should say he was resolute, generous, and kind, with,

perhaps, a tinge of obstinacy as his point of resilience. He is deeply engaged in reading one of a heap of books which lies by him, and taking notes the while, and by his compressed brows and lips, appears swallowed up in his task.

"I declare you two are unbearable," exclaims Gertrude, at length, "sitting here like monks at La Trappe. You are no better than tame mice."

"Then I am sure you are like a wild cat," said Edgar, looking up wearily from his work, "you have done nothing but pace up and down, like an animal caged, for the last hour."

"Well, Edgar, and that's just what I feel," and she paused in mid career, with her hands behind her, like a little Napoleon, as Mabel said. "I feel regularly caged and cooped up here, and I want to get out; now I don't believe either of you two 'dumple' creatures ever know that feeling."

"Those who feel most, show least," was Edgar's answer, while Mabel looked up with a smile, and said, "You silly little restless thing, it is only because you are so idle. Come and get some work, and don't chafe so."

"Ah, it is easy to say get some work, but I hate it, and I have lost my thimble."

"That's the third in a week," remarked Edgar.

"Nonsense, it is no such thing. And then I always hurt my finger, and I don't want to do it. Oh, Mabel, how I wish we were rich! How I wish we could just spend this afternoon as we wished. What should we do? let us settle what we should all do. Come, Edgar," and she playfully pulled all his hair over his eyes, and closed his book.

"Oh Gertrude, Gertrude, you will neither be industrious yourself nor let others be so. Well, what is it?" and he not unwillingly pushed his books and writing instruments away.

"Look here, dear, and you too, you sober old Mabel, if we can't be comfortable in reality, let us be so in fairy land. Now we may each choose whatever way we please of passing this afternoon. Begin, Mabel."

"Well," laughed she, "if you will be silly, I suppose so may we. Let me think. Of course we are all to be rich,

and happy, and all that. Well, I think I should like for us all to go for a delightful drive in an open carriage—”

“What! in this rain?” interrupted the matter-of-fact Edgar.

“No, you silly boy, you forget the weather and all is to be as we wish. Well, next I should like for us all to be conveyed by magic to the South Kensington Museum we have heard so much of; there we would spend the afternoon, then after tea, we would all go together to hear some grand concert or the opera. There now, there is my afternoon. Now, Edgar, for yours.”

“Ah, I dare say you will call mine unsociable, but I should like you all to do just as you please, and as for myself I should go to the great reading-room at the British Museum, and read Alison, or some such glorious book which I can’t buy, and then in the evening I should like to hear ‘Elijah, or the Walpurgis Night.’”

“Just what I should have expected of my worthy brother and sister, Mr. and Miss Tame-mouse,” laughed Gerrude. “Now hear me. First of all, we would be in London, and it should be a glorious day; then we would just be going for a ride in the Park. I would wear—let me see—a gray habit, a hat with a white feather, tipped with scarlet. Well, there should be plenty of cavaliers—real, big moustachioed and whiskered cavaliers, I mean, not like the humpty dumpty little men of Berchefer. Well, then we would return and dress for dinner, and afterwards go to a really grand ball—plenty of people, nice people, I mean, and all that kind of thing. Oh, Mabel, what should my dress be? Stay—I have it—maize silk and black lace, and one yellow rose in my hair. Mabel, would it not be lovely?”

Just then the door opened, and an amiable looking, middle aged lady, whose handsome features bore a striking likeness to those of the animated speaker, asked, laughingly, “Who is going to wear a maize coloured silk and black lace, I should like to know?”

“Your worthy daughter here, mamma dear,” was the reply, “at a ball in cloud-land, given by the Prince of the Shadows. Shall I not look well?”

“You dear, silly little thing, I fear those are the only balls

you are likely to go to. Well, never mind, there are more important things even than balls : and that reminds me, Mabel dear, will you set light to the fire? Papa will be in directly ; I have just finished for the day with him at those horrid papers. He looks so sadly tired and dragged, that we must make things comfortable."

The ready Mabel is on her knees in an instant, and works away at the fire with a simple, hearty energy, that soon produces cheerful results. Mother and children gather round, and are pleasantly chatting when the door opens, and Mr. Keightley enters. A tall, handsome man, more resembling Gertrude than either of the other children. Fair and clear complexioned, somewhat bald, but with a fringe of silver hair which speaks of curly chestnut locks in youth, some twenty years back, perhaps. Keen, clear, blue eyes gleam out pleasantly and cheerfully, and a smile plays on his lips. A man this, who has seen and bravely endured trouble, learning somewhat by it, and putting a bright face on whatever may be the heaviness of the heart within. I think I see whence Gertrude has gathered her saucy gaiety, and whence Mabel learnt that calm confidence and cheerful bearing.

"Well, papa, how get on the papers?" asks Gertrude, a question which demands some explanation.

Now it chanced that Algernon Patrick, twelfth Duke of Bumbledom, having been in his life time a laborious and elaborate member of the English aristocracy, had, at his death, directed that all his papers, letters, despatches, and correspondence generally, should be carefully collected and edited by such able person as his successor to the title might think proper to appoint. Such was his will and pleasure, and such was it the desire of his son and heir to obey. Possibly the papers aforesaid might not be interesting generally to the British public, consisting chiefly of invitations to dinner, remarks on the weather, recipes for rheumatism and cough pills ; still, as documentary evidence to the powers and natural bent of the Bumbledom mind and genius, the present duke felt that they could not but be both entertaining and instructive to those of educated and refined minds.

He had, therefore, applied in various directions for some one, whose literary capabilities were equal to the magnitude of the subject he would have to handle. The choice was difficult. Macaulay was dead—Alifon engaged upon a work altogether trifling as compared with that proposed, simply a history of Europe; so in due time a publisher, to whom he made application, recommended him to secure the services of Mr. Cyril Keightley, of whom he was able to give the most flattering account.

In this way it happened that all the Bumbledom papers came into the possession of the above-named gentleman, and the editing and arranging them, "so as to correspond with the despatches of the late Duke of Wellington," was now his daily labour, for a remuneration, the smallness of which, I am ashamed to name. I fear his estimate of the Bumbledom papers is not high, for he answers to his daughter, "Don't speak of them, my dear, I am almost wearying of their existence. Of all the conceited, sanctimonious, leather-headed old owls that ever lived, I should say that Algernon Patrick was the worst. All to-day's work has been to arrange, number, and catalogue about two hundred little notes written by him when Lord Poguey, as 'Dear Roguey, come and dine with me to-day.—Yours, Poguey,' and other such rubbish. I wanted the duke to omit them, but no."

"It is a sacred trust, sir, to which I will not be a traitor. Every word, nay every letter, that my respected and noble parent wrote shall appear. Who knows what effect some apparently trifling expression may not have upon reflecting minds? No, sir, they must all appear. That was his answer."

"He is just like his father," said Edgar, "But yet he is a great man, and in the House of Lords—forms part of the hereditary wisdom of the country. The advantage of money."

"Don't grumble, my boy," says the father. "I should think you would not care to be rich upon such terms."

"No indeed, father, but I certainly should like to have somewhat more. Poverty is an evil."

"But even granting that, which I do not unconditionally, it does not prove wealth to be a good. After all, they

depend upon too many circumstances for one to be able to pronounce upon absolutely. But I am scarcely 'up' to a controversy this afternoon, the Bumbledom despatches have been enough for me. My dear, did you hear a ring at the bell? I do sincerely hope that it is no one for me, just as I meant to enjoy myself."

But Mr. Keightley's hopes were doomed to disappointment, for after a little discussion in the passage, and the sound of the opening the study door, the servant entered to announce that a lady wished to see Mr. Keightley.

"A lady? Why, who can it be?" was the general exclamation, as he rose and with a weary sigh left the room to receive his unknown guest. He entered the small, barely-furnished room which was called the study, and beheld, to his astonishment, a lady, tall and slender, dressed in the deepest mourning. Her veil was down, but even so he caught a glimpse of shining golden hair, sufficient to assure him that she was not only young, but pretty. With his usual courtesy he advanced towards where she stood, resting one hand upon a table as if for support, and begged her to be seated. Her voice was somewhat tremulous, but very sweet, as she thanked him, and Mr. Keightley began to wish to hear its soft accents again. He observing, however, some hesitation and nervousness, he paused a moment before he said, "I was told that you had some business with me. Can I be of service to you in any way? if so, believe me, I shall be most happy to assist you, although at present I have not the pleasure of knowing your name."

The kind manner in which this was said, appeared to reassure his visitor, for partly raising her veil she replied, "My name is Margaret Philipson."

"Is it possible that you are the daughter of my late cousin, Edward Philipson; why, in that case, we are relations, although somewhat distant. I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, and have often lamented that I knew so little of your existence; but the difference between our respective positions was too great to allow of much intimacy."

He extended his hand in friendly greeting, but to his

surprise, Margaret arose, and standing before him without accepting the proffered hand, began in tones half resolute, half tremulous, which grew firmer, however, as she proceeded: "Mr. Keightley, I have a great duty to perform, which has brought me here, and I cannot rest until it be done. I must throw myself upon your clemency to a great extent, and trust to your generosity, but whatever are the consequences, I will go through it. Mr. Keightley, you have been robbed and defrauded of what is rightfully your own, and I am now come to restore you to it."

Keightley listened in undisguised amazement and almost alarm to these words. He began to think that his fair cousin was raving, and yet in spite of her agitation, there was something which spoke of truth. His visitor noticed the shade of incredulity on his face, and answered his yet unspoken words. "It is not as you think—I am neither mad nor an impostor. Read this document and then you will believe me," as she spoke, she handed to him the fatal will that had caused so many tears and struggles. He took it and commenced its perusal, half in a dream as it were, and every now and then glancing from the parchment to Margaret, who, pale but determined, and almost strong in her intense resolve, stood now with her veil thrown back and her eyes fixed steadily upon him, as though she would read his thoughts. But as he proceeded, and began to penetrate the mystery, his looks changed and deepened—wonder and intense joy, took the place of distrust and suspicion; and at length, as he finished the document and laid it down again, he stood for a moment speechless and with his brow shaded with his hand, as if to collect his scattered thoughts. At length he looked up, and turning to Margaret, said in an unsteady voice, "Are you fully aware, Miss Philipson, of the nature of this will, and the effect it has upon your position?"

"Perfectly," was the simple answer. "I know that it entirely transfers to you the property lately enjoyed by papa."

"True, but do you know that by surrendering this to me, you give up all your own rights; that, in fact, you rob yourself to enrich me."

"No, they are not, my rights. I have no possible claim upon them. It is all yours, and I only give you your own."

"Excuse me, if I ask you one or two questions. How came you by this will? Does any one else know of its existence? I inquire, because, at present, it is so great a mystery that I cannot fathom it."

"I know that I shall appear to prevaricate, though that is far from my wish. I may say that two others have known of this will of whom one only is alive; how I came by it, it is not mine to tell you. Pity me, Mr. Keightley, for I am bound by the most sacred ties that a human being can be held by, not to reveal more than concerns myself; but this I may say, this resignation to you of your property is solely of myself, and by my own free will and wish. I have known that it was yours some time, but have not been a free agent. This is the first time that I have had the opportunity of doing this act of justice. Be merciful, and do not press me farther." Her voice faltered and she appeared ready to faint. In a moment a sudden light seemed to flash in upon Keightley. As he glanced at her black dress, the nature of the restraint which had been upon her, but now had been removed, became clear, and he saw that it was her father's death which had enabled her to reinstate him in his own. "Noble girl," he cried, "I did not think there was such uprightness and heroism in the world. And do you voluntarily deprive yourself of all the world holds dear, to do an act of justice to one you have never seen? At least such generosity will not be unrewarded. Heaven forbid that I should pry or inquire into any point of which you desire me to remain ignorant. I promise you on my faith, as a Christian gentleman, never to ask for any of the particulars of this case, whether as concerning you or any one else. But let me ask one thing—you are aware that this will leaves you nothing whatever?"

"I am."

"I must claim, then, a right to restore to you something of that which you have so nobly renounced. You must, indeed, allow me, in common fairness, to do so. I cannot have it otherwise."

"Thank you very much for your kindness," said Margaret through her tears, "but this must not be. I cannot, will not touch any portion of that fortune which now has returned to its rightful owner. It is enough for me that I have done my duty. I shall not be unprovided for, I assure you, and I have passed through too much sorrow in the midst of wealth, to fear poverty. Farewell, Mr. Keightley, and may God bless you and yours."

The words were scarcely uttered, before the sable clad figure departed like a dream, leaving Mr. Keightley in the act to speak. There was no time or opportunity for arresting her, and the next moment the house door closed. It needed all Keightley's power of mind to persuade himself that all had not been some strange, wild dream, from which he must presently wake, to find himself as before. His mysterious visitor, her strange revelations, his sudden accession of wealth—were all these real, or had he only dreamt them? But the broad, yellow parchment on the table, was present to reassure him, and at length he was able, in all simplicity and sincerity, to fall on his knees, and pour forth his most earnest, grateful thanks to Him who had dealt so wondrously, and preserved the cause of justice and truth. As he rose from his knees, the door opened, and his wife and children appeared, in some alarm at his long delay. But here let us leave them, nor intrude upon so solemn a scene of family joy and happiness. Imagine it as you will, reader, and you can scarcely over estimate their pure delight. Adversity, well and manfully borne, had duly prepared them for prosperity. Amiability and peacefulness of disposition, made them unanimous in their mutual congratulations and thankfulness: and so let the curtain drop upon this happy family group, whom we may leave in peace.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AFTER THE STRUGGLE.

MARGARET's life for the last few months had been a succession of trials and struggles, in which, though ultimately victorious, she had received deadly wounds, and purchased her triumph at the cost of all feelings of hope, youth, or joy. The necessity of refusing Leonard, the discovery of her father's fraud, his sudden death, and the surrender of all her fortune—all these had set their mark upon her, and crushed, as it were, all vitality, all light and joy from her very existence. Life had become a very weary round and routine, along which she passed unwillingly. The past had too bitter remembrances to be dwelt on—the future was a gloomy cloud which her eye failed to pierce; and now, with all sunshine and verdure, and pleasant flowers faded from the path of her existence, day after day dragged on like a monotonous dirge set in a minor key. She felt, it is true, a certain satisfied feeling that she had, at least, not spared herself in the performance of her duty; that affections, interest, self, had all been immolated upon the altar of sincerity and truth; but though the right hand had been cut off and the right eye been plucked out, yet she was but mortal, and could not but feel the smart and bleeding wound, though she set her face as a flint, and would not regret what she had done. Immediately after her father's death, she had held deep inquiry with herself as to what course she must pursue, and having once decided upon, and mapped out her path, she steadily refused to swerve therefrom, even though at times it led her through briery and stony places, flint-strewn and desolate among the ruins of

all she had loved best, where the shadows closed over her fast, and the dark waters seemed fathomless, still she kept on. Edith's ready assent to her plan of restitution had, however, removed her greatest difficulty. She was now entirely a free agent, and was at liberty to carry out her schemes unmolested. Thus, her interview with her cousin Keightley accomplished, she was able to think once again of Northmoor. She had at length wrung from Edith a somewhat reluctant consent to this part of her scheme, for her love for her amiable step-daughter was too deep for her not to regret their separation. Margaret's sense of duty, however, prevailed over all entreaties, and finally it was decided that she should write to her aunts, and propose a visit. Although, of course, they had heard of their brother's death, and, indeed, some mysterious rumours of a reverse in his fortunes had reached them, yet, they were far from a knowledge of the real state of the case and the circumstances attending it. It seemed best, therefore, and kindest to them, simply to state, that at his decease an earlier will had been discovered, which deprived her of all her fortune; and such was the tenor of Margaret's letter, couched in as cheerful a strain as she could command. The despondency of her mind was, however, evident, and it needed no request from her to call forth the warmest expressions of sympathy, and the most pressing of invitations in return from the two warm-hearted old ladies. Every caressing epithet was lavished upon her, and even Aunt Kate for once laid aside the Johnsonian style of her epistles, for one which, if not so classic and chaste, spoke more eloquently of real flesh and blood. Her residence henceforward must be Northmoor; all that they had was hers, and by the will of each, all was to vest in her after their decease. So all was decided, and a few days after Margaret's sudden visit to the Keightleys, she was on her way to Marbury and Northmoor. The parting with Edith had been a great trial. Their friendship had been of a kind rarely found between step-mother and daughter, especially where difference of age had raised up such a seeming barrier. Perhaps the great secret was, that they had suffered together,

which had elicited their mutual sympathies. As we have seen, at a very early part of their relationship, Margaret's gentle character began to exercise an influence upon Edith's sterner disposition, and now the latter could not but feel that the change in her feelings and affections had mainly been effected through the example which Margaret had unconsciously set her. She loved, then, with the whole force of her nature, this tender, pale, little blossom, which, in spite of its frailness and fragility, possessed such sterling qualities. She respected the decision and resolution she had shown in trials and adversities, under which one less firm would have been entirely overwhelmed; and now she sincerely lamented the necessity which sundered her from one whose presence made her happier and more inwardly at peace than she had been for many a long year. But it *was* a necessity, and to it she was forced to yield, so she would not shake that firmness which she so much admired, by any more entreaties, and parted with Margaret with a warmth of love and sincerity of regret, which, some months back, she would have deemed it impossible for her to feel. Her own steps were turned towards the residence of her parents, which she entered with a firm resolve, that henceforward her time should be spent in trying to atone for the guilty past of ingratitude and neglect. Thus did Margaret's influence extend like the widening circles when a stone is cast into the waves.

Her courage and resolution had almost failed her when she came in sight of Marbury, and recalled the time when, returning from school, she had driven down the long street to Northmoor, and the residence of those aunts whom she then so much dreaded. The thought of how many things had happened since then—the glimpse she just caught of the stately tower of Margrove in the distance, almost overcame her, and she was heartily glad that the little pony-chaise had been exchanged for a close carriage which awaited her, and where her tears would be unobserved. But by the time that the ancient pony had traversed the road to Northmoor and finally drawn up before the well remembered cottage, she had somewhat regained her

composure, and mastering her emotion, was able to receive the long hearty embrace of the good sisters, with a decent show of calmness. It was indeed a greeting. Months had passed since last they met, months, fraught with death, trouble, trials, and griefs; and in the pale, grave figure, clad in deepest sable, on whose face sorrow had set her mark so keenly, her aunts could scarcely recognise the cheerful, happy girl whose presence had of old so enlivened the house. Her languid movements and listless air, too clearly showed how sorely her mind had been tried, though she struggled to conceal her grief and was as thoughtful and unselfish as ever. "Sister," remarked Miss Kate to Anne, one day when their niece was away. "Sister, there is something wrong with that girl. It is not sorrow for poor Edward only, though I know she does regret him deeply; nor is it for her lost fortunes, for she is not mercenary and does not care for money in the least. What, then, is it? She looks crushed and has no more spirit, so to say, than a midge, though I am sure I do not know why a midge should be supposed to have so little spirit, for I am sure they sting sharply enough. Now what is it, Anne? That is what I want to know, and that is what I will find out too. You know she must not die. That is not to be thought of for a minute—I could not hear of it, and yet she pines and wastes away like a shadow. She does not eat, she scarcely ever reads or opens a book, and never goes out of the garden. Sister Anne, what is to be done?"

"Well, I am sure I can't say, Kate. If you don't know, how can I? Perhaps she wants society?"

"Don't be silly, Anne, she won't even see the Allams, and scarcely could I persuade her to come down when Dr. Evans called the other day."

"Well, Kate, do you think she wants change of air?"

"She has not been here long enough to need that; but if I think she does and it will do her good, she shall go to Brighton, or Brussels, or Bavaria too, if she likes it," said the good lady with increasing energy and decision. Miss Anne heard with placid astonishment but acquiesced, as indeed she always did in the allocutions of her elder sister.

Mentally trusting however, that Bavaria might only be a bold figure of speech to show the extent of Miss Kate's devotion, and that her dear niece would not require so great a change as that. So the time passed on at Northmoor, and day after day was added to the past without any improvement in Margaret's health or spirits. Though she neglected nothing that she esteemed a duty, yet she had not been able to persuade herself to mix just yet in society, and continued to live in almost total seclusion, seeing none but her aunts and the rector, who observed and lamented her state, which seemed beyond his power to alleviate or remove; But she secretly in her heart of hearts, was pining for some news of Leonard, whose image was ever before her. Night after night dragged by feverish attempts to recal almost every word she had ever heard him utter, to picture him as she once remembered him in those happy days which had passed for ever; and yet her mind, with the obstinacy peculiar to certain morbid forms of disease, refused to bring him before her in any other guise than as a blood-stained corpse, cast under foot in the din and roar of battle, whose last words had been an execration on the head of her who had sent him to perish on the arid soil of the East. With such thoughts, with such unwholesome spectres for companions, it was not wonderful that her sleep and appetite left her, and her strength decreased daily. In a short time she would have become a broken, hopeless invalid, and would have sunk under her burden, but help was at hand and from an unexpected quarter. One morning at breakfast, a letter in an unknown handwriting was given her, and with a vague feeling, too listless to be called wonder, she opened it and read the following:—

"MY DEAR MISS PHILIPSON.—Though circumstances have separated us, they have not, I think, destroyed or impaired our capabilities for true friendship. I still regard the time when I became acquainted with you as one of the happiest portions of my existence, and in thus speaking, I only express the true feelings of my heart without disguise or exaggeration. You are, I know, in sorrow and trouble.

and have passed through great trials : your mind must need entire rest and change, your system refreshment and repose. Come to Brancepeth, where you will be entirely unknown, and will find a change from places which can only recal sad circumstances. Come to Brancepeth, where you will meet with sincere sympathy and love from your old friend, Sybil. Come to Brancepeth, where the wild northern nature calls up, like an enchantress, all that is noble, and fair, and elevating. Dear Margaret, as I write, the sun goes down scarlet in a sea of blood, purple bars mark the horizon, all is grand and glorious, but it wants your presence. Come then, my dear Margaret, and gladden your friend,

“SYBIL CLARE.”

Margaret read the energetic invitation twice, smiling amid her tears, and then passed it to her aunts, who had followed her perusal with eager eyes and working mouths. Aunt Kate at once remarked, “You will go of course, my dear—it is the very thing for you;” and when the earnest solicitations of sister Anne were added, after a few slight objections, Margaret finally consented, and it was so arranged, to the satisfaction of all.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE NORTHERN ENERGY.

WHAT strange, wild charm is there in the north which gives the great northern road a romantic, mysterious interest beyond all others, and even in these railway days, makes us respect that mighty branch or artery of traffic into the northern counties more than any other? Languid southerners, dwellers in the garden of England, cannot fully realize or enter into those trenchant sweeps of moor—those impetuous beckes full of speckled trout; the waste of bracken and brown purple heather, relieved by clumps of stunted bushes. They shudder even to think of those fierce, wild, December nights, when far away over the broad plain of snow, the furnace mouths on the horizon, glow like the eyes of some grim giants, guardians of the soil; and the winds rushing from every quarter of the heavens, wrestle and strive together for the mastery, until it seems as if all traces of vegetation must be swept away by their violence. But the real north countryman loves all this—loves it, perhaps, in a silent, quiet manner, as is his nature, and says little; but, nevertheless, his whole character is moulded and formed by the elements of the scenery among which he lives. From a child, Margaret had always been filled with an intense longing to see the north, and make acquaintance with its beauties—a desire much fostered and increased by the glowing descriptions in which Sybil had indulged while on her visit to Gaunt House. But it had never seemed probable to her that she should be able to realize that favourite project of her mind, and it had gradually been dwelt on less and less till the arrival of Sybil's invita-

tion stirred up some of the old longings and desire. Some, indeed, but how different, she could not help thinking, as she wearily reclined in the railway carriage, would have been her emotion at any other time when her heart would have been more ready to apprehend pleasurable sensations. As it was, her chief idea in this northern visit was that she might, perhaps, hear some tidings of Leonard's fortunes, more than she had at present been able to glean. The cry of the guard as the train stopped at a little station, "Ongar for Door'm, Fenfooses, and Soonderland, lap oot," aroused her from a reverie to the recollection that that was where she had been instructed to change lines. After a short delay, and she was being whirled away to Door'm, or Durham, the precipitous and romantic situation of which, built as it is on seven hills, did not fail to excite a feeling of wonder and admiration. At the expiration of a few minutes, as she stepped out on the platform, she felt herself clasped in the firm embrace of her warm-hearted friend, who, with falcon eye, had been scanning every carriage to seek her out.

"Come, Margaret," said the latter, "this is no place for greetings. Let us be off. The man will see to the boxes, and we will be at Brancepeth in no time. Down, you fond thing," said she, rebuking a huge liver-coloured dog, whom she called Fro. "I cannot have you kill my friend with your kindness. Here is the carriage."

The splendid pair of grays soon whirled them through the streets of Durham and over a quaint old steeply pitched bridge, which led them out of the city on to the road to Brancepeth. The whole way was a succession of abrupt sweeps of moorland rising at times almost precipitously; sometimes the road was flanked on either side by huge banks, covered with stunted bushes and brown gorse and heather, but generally it ran level with the moor over which it was cut. When they had attained a great height in this continuous rise, Sybil ordered the servant to stop and block the wheels, while they turned round to survey the landscape beneath. It was a magnificent sight, and one which brought a brighter flush to Margaret's cheek than

had been there many a day past. The downward purple-brown sweep of the gorge and heather-covered moor, with scarce a tree in sight, and with only huge tufts of fern and bracken to relieve its sombre waste, the valley or bottom, where to the left lay Durham, itself a hill to some yet lower moor, the great boundary line of the hills which bestrode and edged the view like a band of giants laid down to rest, and the glittering ripple of the river, which just caught the eye at times like a silver ribbon plaited and twisted about a russet garb; all these formed a glorious whole, which caused a mighty throbbing in Margaret's heart, a misty moisture about her eyes.

"Ah, Sybil," said she at length, "I understand now, how you love the north. I see how you get your energy and fire. It is impossible, I should think, to be inactive or idle here."

To which speech old Peter ventured to reply, "Oh, young miss, to be sure, truly north country folk kinder like our own place. But there's a many, north or south, who like laiking a deal better than work."

"Yes! I fear Peter is not far wrong, Margaret, and I cannot claim that distinction for my native land. But it is very grand, is it not? It always seems to me as if one were nearer nature herself here in all her majesty, than anywhere else. But, come, we must be moving on, or the evening mists will catch us. Now, Peter, we are ready." The grays flew forward, and seemed resolved to annihilate time and space. As the darkness closed in and they whirled along over the apparently interminable waste of moor, where the eye could scarcely guide them, Margaret observed with surprise, what she thought was a fiery sunset down on the dark horizon, barred in a strange way with occasional gloomy clouds. She pointed out the phenomenon to Sybil, who was much amused at her mistake, and informed her that those were the furnace mouths some miles off, which caused this perpetual sunset colour. She began a lively and graphic description of a mine which she had lately visited, and thus the time passed so rapidly and secretly that both were amazed, when Peter turned to Mar-

garet to inform her "Yon's t' hoose." Brancepeth Hall stood somewhat in advance of the rest of the village. The road up to it was shaded by several fine firs and larches, while behind it sloped a little hill covered by elegant trees, and shrubs, and soft green moss, and violets. At the bottom ran a beck of some size, in which was many a speckled trout, and which farther down increased to such magnitude, as to require one or two wooden bridges to span it. A gravelled and flagged court formed the principal entrance to the house, which was somewhat remarkably arranged. You entered by the porch into a great vestibule hung around with stag's heads and antlers, alternating with large groups of weapons of all ages and countries. Eight great torches placed in huge, old-fashioned candelabra, illumined this hall, which, with its old oak carvings, sculptured coats of arms, and quaint blazonies, had quite a feudal aspect. At the upper end of this vestibule ran a long gallery bisecting the house, at each end of which oaken staircases led to the upper gallery, while along the sides were ranged the various sitting and eating apartments. All of the rooms were left as originally built, with the addition only of such modern improvements as seemed desirable. But the quaint, diamond-shaped casements with their massive mullions, the pannelled wainscot, the huge fire place, had all been left untouched, undefaced, though comfortable chairs, couches, and modern ornaments, had been added. As the carriage drew up in front of the house, a chorus of dogs of all sizes rushed forward with frantic delight to greet their mistress, among whom the gigantic and solemn Fro, towered supreme. Sybil pushed through them all, and catching Margaret in her arms as she descended, exclaimed, "At last I have you in my own house. Oh, if you knew how I had wearied for this, and how I feared it would never come to pass. Come now, I mean to make you quite rosy and bonny before I let you go. But I suppose keeping you here in the draught, is not the best way to effect that," so saying she led her within the house where every comfort that could be thought of awaited her in her room. Mrs. Atkinson was away on a visit to some friends in Scotland, and so the duties of hostess fell un-

dividedly upon Sybil, and she was fully equal to them—accustomed to the generous notions of hospitality which prevail in the north, which came naturally to her warm-hearted nature, all her desire was to make Margaret's visit as charming as possible. To this end all her efforts were directed, and she tended and cared for her guest as a loving mother would some sickly child, providing for her comforts and amusements with a delicate and sincere care, which of itself was very charming. It was a pretty sight to see the two friends on the evening of Margaret's arrival, when the tea equipage, with all its bounteous stores of oat cakes, and dampers, and pepper cakes, and many other delicacies had been removed, with large arm chairs drawn close up to the cheerful blaze, Margaret leaning back, her pale cheeks somewhat flushed with excitement, while the stronger Sybil bent over her, stroking her smooth hair, patting her thin hand, caressing her, and all the time keeping up a never-failing stream of conversation, inquiry, remarks, and musical laughter, which might have stirred the heart of a recluse. She was eager in her inquiries after all connected with Northmoor.

"Oh, Margaret, do you remember the Bee, and those two dear old batchelors, Dr. Evans and Mr. Villiers? Was it not delightful? I cannot tell you how often I have thought of that day, and, indeed, of all my visit to Gaunt House, when I first saw you. Then those ridiculous Allams who were so absurd! I shall never forget Reginald the impeccable, and his sweet sister! We have no such people here, I am afraid, so we must find something else to laugh over. Come, Margaret, tell me what is become of those people with the Cornish name, Tremaine—no, Trevennen, that is it. I rather liked the son, Arthur, I think, his name was. Where is he?"

"They went abroad some time last autumn, Sybil," replied Margaret, with a very faint blush. "I had a kind note from Mrs. Trevennen the other day to tell me, amongst other things, that Arthur was engaged to Lady Constance Gower; it is a match on which she had long fixed her heart, and I am very glad to hear of it."

"Glad, Margaret," asked her friend with some surprise, "do you know—now you must not be offended with me—I always thought he was attached to you."

"You were right, dear, but it was not necessary for me to be attached to *him*. Indeed, I suppose there is now no breach of confidence in my telling you that he asked me to become his wife once."

"And you?"

"I told him that I did not feel as he desired. That I liked and respected him as a friend, but could not regard him as anything more. I knew that his fancy for me would presently come to an end, and it is far better as it is."

"He was a well-meaning young man," remarked Sybil, with the quiet air with which she always gave her opinion upon people, "but I did not think him good enough for you. You must have some paladin of chivalry, with splendid mailed charger, and spear ever in rest in behalf of beauty and truth—Sir Gawaine or Sir Percival, in fact."

She stopped in her speech, for her words had so powerfully recalled to Margaret's mind her old ideas of Leonard, that the conscious blood rushed into her face, which, from deadly pale, became in an instant in a flame. But she changed the conversation with great tact into an account of how Brancepeth derived its name from the path of a great bear, which ultimately met its fate at the hand of some brave champion who freed all the country from the monster. And so she passed on to indifferent topics, until she saw her guest had somewhat recovered herself. That night Sybil Clare held a long consultation with herself, as she walked up and down her own tapestried bed-room, and the subject of this cogitation was her guest. "There is a mystery about her which I must and will fathom. Why is Margaret pale, and wan, and languid, Sybil Clare? Why is she so utterly wretched as I see she is? I know it has nothing to do with her property, for that she never cared for. Look here, Sybil Clare," added she, apostrophising herself, "you used to have some penetration; now set your brains to find this out—why did Margaret refuse Leonard? Can it be that she still loves him? I half think so, I declare.

But why then did she refuse him? Why did she blush to-night when I spoke of knights, I should like to know? Can it be that she always loved him, and now regrets her refusal? I *will* find out, and if there *be* a mystery, I will try and fathom it."

With this deep resolve, Sybil Clare went to bed, where it did not trouble her so much as to make her lose her sleep. The next and many following days were spent by the two friends in "foraging," as the housekeeper said, all over the hall and grounds. Sometimes they went out for long walks on the moors, towards the dark blue hill, over which Margaret always longed to climb, and peep down upon the land beyond. Sometimes their afternoons were spent in rambling in the little hanging wood behind the house, amid the violets, primroses, and wild hyacinths, which formed its mosaic floor. Occasionally a light pony-carriage conveyed them down to the village, to call on some of Sybil's favourite pensioners, who gazed with unwonted interest and pleasure upon the fair young lady who had come from down south, and mentally contrasted her looks with their own young mistress's bonny face and firm, elastic step. Sybil was exhaustless in her schemes of amusement, though (with a consideration rarely shown by the strong to the weak) they were all adapted to the delicate state of her guest's health and spirits. She would narrate long histories and legends of border heroes and their forays—she tempted her to join her in duets, or when tired, would sit and read aloud to her, poetry from the chivalrous strains of Scott to the deeper muse of Tennyson. Still, all this time, for now Margaret had been with her ten days, though she thought her guest looked stronger and better than when she first came to Brancepeth, yet the same gloom and depression hung over her spirits like a cloud. She made many an effort against it, it is true—she tried hard to be amused, and pleased, and interested by Sybil's kind attempts, but the wound she had received in the battle of life, still remained unhealed, and she was a prey to her own sad thoughts. At last Sybil resolved upon hazarding a bold stroke to win or lose all. Fortune favoured her. One wet afternoon, when walking was

impossible, she proposed to Margaret that they should examine an old portfolio of drawings which had lain in a bed-room untouched for many years. There is a great pleasure in looking over old stores, with a constant expectation of momentarily discovering some treasure long lost and forgotten. The two friends were soon busily engaged upon their task, and a pile of ancient woodcuts, maps, and caricatures, together with the dusty hue of their hands, bore witness to their assiduity. At length something turned up.

"Oh Sybil," cried Margaret, "look here; how *did* this lovely water-colour come amongst all this rubbish? why, it is Brancepeth, I declare: here is the house and you, and there is dear old Fro—how beautiful it is done! Who was the artist?" The time was come. "Leonard Aston," was the decided answer.

Margaret rose, as if an arrow had struck her, and pushing the drawings away, walked to the window, against which she leant, though she saw nothing in her tears. Sybil arose and went to her, putting her arm round her waist, "Margaret," said she, and her voice sounded strange and constrained, "there is something amiss, and I must know it. Tell me one thing, truly—do you love Leonard?"

There was a pause and then she whispered, "Yes."

"I knew it," responded Sybil, triumphantly, "I knew it all along. Now, Margaret, I will know more for the clearing of this mystery which is killing you. Why did you refuse him?" No answer, but a half stifled sob. "Nay, Margaret, tell me for his sake as well as yours; was it your own doing?"

"Not quite, but I could not do otherwise."

"Did you love him when you refused him?"

"Oh, Sybil, be merciful, I cannot tell you all."

"I *am* merciful, Margaret; it is true mercy which makes me ask all this. I will not see you pine away in this manner. Was it for some one else?"

"Sybil, I have always loved him from the moment I first saw him, but *most* of all when I refused him. It nearly cost me my life to do so, and it is the thought that he perhaps has misunderstood me which is killing me."

"Then you loved no one else, and yet refused him?"

"Yes, it is true, I have never loved any one but Leonard, and I love him still. But it was an actual duty and a sacred duty to another of whom I may not speak, and I refused him, because I could not have married him with a clear conscience then."

"But *now*?"

"Why ask? He is away and thinks me false or heartless. Oh, Sybil, I am most wretched."

"Then the impediment is removed?"

"Yes," nodded Margaret, and instantly felt herself clasped in the arms of her friend. The surgeon had probed deep and found the real hurt. The mystery was solved.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FINALE.

BURNING summer. A fiery sun in the heart of the dog days parches up Southampton, and the great city seems to pant and quiver under its power, and casts envious glances at the dancing green waves, foam tipped and jubilant, which catch the sunbeams and glitter with borrowed light. Longing and expectant glances too, for the great steamer Euryalus from India, may be looked for to-day, and just now the Indian news is worth hearing. A few dozens of anxious fathers, mothers, and other relatives, are pacing the port in eager converse, and impatient at the delay. Many of them are relatives who look for a son, a husband, or brother, by this steamer; pray heaven none be disappointed. There! the man on the look-out has signalled the Euryalus, up goes the flag on the staff, and the buzz of excitement deepens among the crowd, as in the far distance a tiny, black speck is perceived, which gradually increases and draws nearer and nearer, until every eye can see plainly that it is the long expected vessel. Telescopes are raised and firmly brought to bear upon her as she advances, boldly ploughing the waters, and flinging off the long foamy trails right and left. Ah, there is a shriek! Some mother has recognised her son on the deck, and faints with joy. Every one chatters polite congratulations and expressions of interest. But these things are matters of every day occurrence and do not detain the mind long. Here she comes, terribly grand and calm, and utterly careless of the anxious crowd with its mingled burden of sorrow and joy. A few minutes more and there is no need of glasses. Joyous, beaming, well

remembered faces crowd up to the sides of the Euryalus, and exchange frantic recognitions with those on shore. After a series of nautical manœuvres, interesting to sailors, puzzling to landmen, she is brought to, and the boat soon begins to be filled. Brawny English arms vigorously bring her through the foaming waves, and at length the boat delivers up her load to enthusiastic Portsmouth and its expectant crowd. Ah, yes, here they are, the heroes, the brave soldiers—how noble, how chivalrous, how—(anything you please)! In the midst of which tumult, two men land unnoticed, in perfect silence: no mother's or father's arms receive them eagerly, no friends rush forward with hearty clasp, no kind voices welcome them back again. They stand alone. One is a young man in the dress of a cavalry officer; he is, perhaps, some four or five-and-twenty, handsome, bronzed, and with a rather happy, careless look. His name is Walmond. His companion, at least eight or nine years older, is evidently somewhat of an invalid: perhaps he has been wounded in battle, for he wears a half military costume. His is a very grave and earnest countenance—the look of one who has suffered deeply both in mind and body, but has learnt some useful lesson by it. In spite of his dark moustache, his sunburnt skin, and weary look, I recognise Leonard Aston.

“Come, Aston,” says his companion, “what is the first thing to be done?”

“I mean to go at once to the post office, and see if there is anything for me; and yet I don't know why, for no one knows of my sudden return. Well, never mind, it is worth trying.”

“Well, I don't care if I go too—not that I *can* hear from any one. It will do as well as anything else. What do you mean to do with yourself, Aston, now you are in England again—farm once more?”

“Yes. I shall go home at once, and take up my tangled skein where I left it, happy only if I can at all gather in the lost and broken threads. Ah, here we are at the office. Any letters, India bound, in the names of Walmond or Aston?”

The clerk retires, and presently comes back with the inquiry, “What Christian names?”

"Lieutenant Stephen Walmond, of the Twenty-third, and Leonard Aston."

"All right, sir; one for you," is the response, as a letter is handed over to Leonard.

"Thought there would be nothing for me," growled his companion. "Well, old fellow, don't stand on ceremony—read away."

"How very odd," says Leonard, "from my cousin at Brancepeth; why, I don't think she ever wrote to me before. I hope nothing is wrong."

The next moment the seal is broken and the epistle spread open. A moment's silence, and then Walmond, who, forgetful of his own disappointment, has been watching Leonard's face, suddenly exclaims—

"Good heavens, Aston, what is it? no bad news I hope. Why, you are as pale as death! Here, come into this shop."

He puts his hand on his friend's arm to lead him into a confectioner's shop just by, but to his surprise, Leonard resists, and a strange bright smile breaks out upon his face, like the sun out of a very gloomy sky, which, at least, shows that his surprise is not unpleasant.

"No—no," at last he says, "let me alone—I am all right." Then he mutters, "Mine—is it possible—not false and heartless? Thank God! thank God," till Walmond begins to doubt his reason. Then again Aston seems to recover from a dream. "I must be off at once—don't be surprised, my dear Walmond, but I have just learnt a piece of great—of the greatest good news, and I must be off into the north at once; that sorrow which drove me abroad, which has preyed upon me and devoured me for months, is chafed away, and I am the happiest of men. There, get me a cab, my dear, good fellow, if you love me, and let me be off this minute. I will write and tell you all. Good-bye." And before his friend is able to gather his scattered senses, he has plunged into a cab and is being driven wildly to the railway station.

"He'll write—great sorrow—happy man," ejaculated poor Walmond, "why, this is all madness—midsummer madness! I do believe the dog star has bitten him. That's

the way they all go. I know he is going to be married, or some such folly. Well, I can't understand it, and shan't try to."

Meanwhile, that *we* may somewhat comprehend the mystery which so puzzled Stephen Walmond, let us take a peep at the letter which has so excited Leonard, and which he even now continues to read over to himself in the railway carriage, until his opposite neighbour, a stout London banker, begins to deem him off his head. "My dear cousin Leonard," it begins, "if you have any faith or confidence in my love or interest for you, you will return as soon as you read this, for by so doing, you may not only yourself be made happy again, but may restore happiness to one whom you love better than yourself. Margaret Philipson is under the same roof with me as I write this, though she knows not of my letter. She has this day confessed to me that she loves you, and you alone, and that she never ceased to love you. Her refusal to you was not her own act or will, but was almost forced upon her by circumstances which it is not possible for her to tell or you to ask for. Let it suffice you, that her heart is, and ever has been, yours, and I am sure this will be enough for you if you have any fire of chivalry within you. When I add that Margaret is now poor, having resigned her wealth to one who had a prior legal claim, and an orphan, I am sure that I have said enough to give you wings of flame. Come, Leonard, if you would set right all. Come in love and trust, and believe ever in your faithful cousin,

"SYBIL CLARE."

Words of flame, that caused a mighty throbbing and leaping of the heart blood, and brought a glow upon those olive cheeks; words of power which made the stream of life leap back again, and cast oil upon the seething waves. Oh, what words! Could they be true? was it possible that Margaret was his? that she had ever loved him? It was too exquisite bliss to be fully comprehended and grasped by the mind. What though there yet was somewhat of mystery in the past? Perfect confiding love, impetuously broke through the cloud with one glance of

faith. Margaret was his—that was enough ; and the train flew by fields, and hedges, and ditches, and rushed over rivers and viaducts, and roared under tunnels and shrieked at great towns and cities, till all was a whirl and giddy maelstrom of confusion. Even cattle, houses, villages flew by, and still Leonard, with his eager, inward gaze, cried within himself, “Faster, yet faster. Oh, that the hours *would* pass quicker.”

After a somewhat chilly day for June, the winds had agreed to settle the differences which had kept them for hours in a state of struggle and contest, by lulling and dropping altogether, and at last the larches and firs around Brancepeth House are allowed to rest in peace. Others are glad besides the larches, for Sybil and Margaret immediately fall out for a walk in the little hanging wood before described.

“Sybil, dear, I really must soon be returning to Northmoor. Think how long I have been away from my aunts. They must miss me.”

“Ah, that is all very well, to make your vanity excuse for running away from poor Sybil and the north, as if the two good ladies would miss such an insignificant little puff as you. Nonsense, Margaret, you are tired.”

“Don’t be so cruel, Sybil, you know I cannot be tired of you. But I must go back to my duties. I have been idle for the last six or seven weeks, now I must begin to work. Oh, Sybil, how much I have to thank you for. How different I feel from when I first came here. I thought I should have died then.

Just then the housekeeper advances mysteriously to her young mistress, “Please, ma’am, will you come here a moment?”

“What can it be,” wonders Sybil, as she complies, and then a few moments whispering takes place. Margaret fears ill tidings, but is relieved when Sybil turns to her with a beaming face, “Wait, dear, a minute, I must go into the house to see some one on business. Wait here for me.” She is gone like an arrow, and Margaret left alone, begins to gather and pull to pieces wild hyacinths and Star of

Bethlehem. Presently she spies a deserted nest and stoops down to examine it. She hears Sybil's step behind and cries out, "Come here, Sybil, and see this lovely little nest; what bird's is it?" A strong, manly arm, too powerful for Sybil's is round her, a browned face, too dark for Sybil's is bent down to her, and a voice, too deep for Sybil's pleads in her ear.

"Margaret, my own, my darling, look up on me and forgive me for ever having doubted you."

Is it a dream? Is she in heaven? Is this the union after death? It is a moment of mingled surprise, delight, and fear.

Her heart seems ready to burst its way through, but her eyes convince her that it is, indeed, Leonard. What follows I need not say—but if it were a dream, it certainly lasted for some time, for when Sybil came, after at least an hour's prudent delay, she found Margaret still clasped in Leonard's arms, as though they had that moment met.

"Well, you two fond things," is her remark, "are you too ethereal for such a gross idea as tea? Come in, come in, before the night dews arise."

You must be, indeed, dense, my dear reader, if you cannot tell the end of all this. You cannot, I am sure, want it all in detail—how Margaret and Leonard were married, what she wore, and how she looked—how many bridesmaids were present, and what speeches were made. You do not need to be told that they were very happy, as were Mrs. Aston, the two aunts, Edith, Sybil, and all who knew and loved them. No author ever yet finished his story to his reader's satisfaction, and so to escape your censure, and to preserve any kindly feeling I may have gained, I will make you arbiter of the destinies of my minor characters, and dropping the curtain, will bid you deal forth such measures of reward to all as shall please you best.

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